

B-2249

## Mayfair Theater, ruin, (Howard Auditorium, Baltimore Natatorium, Polis Auditorium and Turkish Baths, The Auditorium)

### **Architectural Survey File**

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Users should be aware that additional undigitized material about this property may be found in on-site architectural reports, copies of HABS/HAER or other documentation, drawings, and the “vertical files” at the MHT Library in Crownsville. The vertical files may include newspaper clippings, field notes, draft versions of forms and architectural reports, photographs, maps, and drawings. Researchers who need a thorough understanding of this property should plan to visit the MHT Library as part of their research project; look at the MHT web site ([mht.maryland.gov](http://mht.maryland.gov)) for details about how to make an appointment.

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***Last Updated: 04-12-2011***

B-2249

Mayfair Theatre (Auditorium Theatre)  
508 North Howard Street  
Private

1903

The Mayfair Theatre is one of the two remaining buildings of the original three in the Kernan hotel-theater complex which included the Hotel Kernan (Congress Hotel) (B-2250), the Maryland Theatre (demolished 1951), and the Auditorium Theatre, which was renamed the Mayfair in 1941. The complex was the largest entertainment grouping in early 20th century Baltimore. The architecture of the group was a florid Beaux-Arts-influenced French Renaissance style which is still mostly unchanged in the upper facade of the Mayfair. The theater is also one of the three remaining downtown "movie palaces"; the others are the Hippodrome (B-2338) and the Town (B-2352).

# Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form

## 1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic Auditorium Theatre

and/or common Mayfair Theatre

## 2. Location

street & number 508 North Howard Street  not for publication

city, town Baltimore  vicinity of congressional district 3rd

state Maryland county

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> not applicable	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

## 4. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name JF Theatres, Inc.

street & number 17 West Pennsylvania Avenue telephone no.: 296-7570

city, town Baltimore state and zip code MD 21204

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Baltimore City Courthouse liber RHB 3334

street & number Fayette and Calvert Streets folio 350

city, town Baltimore state MD

## 6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys

title CBD West Survey

date 1976  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records CHAP

city, town Baltimore state MD

# 7. Description

Survey No. B-2249

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved    date of move _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Prepare both a summary paragraph and a general description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

### SUMMARY:

The Mayfair Theatre is a 1903 brick theater building with an elaborate stone and terra cotta facade in Classical Revival style located on the west side of North Howard Street about halfway between West Franklin and Centre Streets in central Baltimore, Maryland. The principal elevation facing east to Howard Street has a street level concealed behind black paneling and twin box offices in half-round columns on each side of the facade. The central doorway is a glass and metal trefoil design. This treatment and the triangular marquee date from about 1963. Above the marquee, the original facade is virtually intact with window openings closed off but unchanged. It is dominated by a central bay of three arches flanked by piers of rusticated stone and a variety of window shapes and trim. The cornice has a complicated roofline with pediments, scrolls, finials, carvings of floral panels, cartouches, and lyres. A mansard covered with copper tiles and featuring three ocular windows is just visible from street level. The interior has been much altered, primarily by the false ceiling in the auditorium which conceals a huge original vault and balconies. The theater is still operating, but recently closed for renovation.

### General Description:

The original Auditorium Theatre (now the Mayfair Theatre) was one of the three parts of the Kernan hotel-and-entertainment complex on North Howard and West Franklin Streets, all of which were linked by interior passages. The Congress Hotel (formerly Hotel Kernan) (B-2250) and the present Mayfair are still linked by subterranean hallways and stairs through the Turkish bath under the theater, although the entire underground area is deteriorated and unused. The theater itself is much altered at the street level exterior and in the interior. The original facade had a large arched entrance flanked by a smaller archway on the south end which was the Turkish bath entrance. The present entrance facade, dating from about 1965, is paneled in black with twin half-round columns at the extreme outer edges which were the box offices. These are not currently in use. Two poster cases flank the entrance, a bank of glass doors surrounded by a trefoil of glass with gold metal muntins. The marquee is triangular and lighted from within. The flat apex of the marquee has the theater's name in a panel with an arc-shaped lower edge.

(see continuation sheet)

# 8. Significance

Survey No. B-2249

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1903 Builder/Architect John D. Allen, architect

check: Applicable Criteria:  A  B  C  D  
 and/or  
 Applicable Exception:  A  B  C  D  E  F  G  
 Level of Significance:  national  state  local

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

### SUMMARY:

The Mayfair Theatre is one of the two remaining buildings of the original three in the Kernan hotel-theater complex which included the Hotel Kernan (Congress Hotel) (B-2250), the Maryland Theatre (demolished 1951), and the Auditorium Theatre, which was renamed the Mayfair in 1941. The complex was the largest entertainment grouping in early 20th century Baltimore. The architecture of the group was a florid Beaux-Arts-influenced French Renaissance style which is still mostly unchanged in the upper facade of the Mayfair. The theater is also one of the three remaining downtown "movie palaces"; the others are the Hippodrome (B-2338) and the Town (B-2352).

### History and Support:

The Auditorium Theatre is built on the foundations of the 1882 Natatorium, a proposed swimming school with a pool in the basement. The school didn't succeed, but the building continued operating as a Turkish bath and light entertainment hall under the name of the Howard Auditorium. The 1882 structure was an exotically decorated cottage-like building with icicle-shaped trip hanging from the gables, cornices, and window frames. Burlesque acts and short dramatic pieces were performed, as well as occasional serious musical concerts. In 1891, James L. Kernan bought the building and remodeled it into a more classical brick-fronted music hall, but kep the name Howard Auditorium.

In 1903, Kernan demolished the old Auditorium to erect the present theater, but kep the Turkish bath, which apparently did well consistently, unlike the entertainment side of the old Auditorium. With the refurbished pool and a connecting passage to the

(see continuation sheet)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Survey No. B-2249

Baltimore Sun, April 5, 1903Headley, R. K., Jr., Exit: A History of Movies in Baltimore, 1974.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property \_\_\_\_\_

Quadrangle name Baltimore EastQuadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References do NOT complete UTM references

A 

Zone	Easting			Northing					

B 

Zone	Easting			Northing					

C 

Zone	Easting			Northing					

D 

Zone	Easting			Northing					

E 

Zone	Easting			Northing					

F 

Zone	Easting			Northing					

G 

Zone	Easting			Northing					

H 

Zone	Easting			Northing					

### Verbal boundary description and justification

co-terminous with irregular-shaped lot approx. 66 ft. 7 in. x 158 ft.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code

state	code	county	code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Janet Davis, Historic Preservation AnalystCommission for Historical andorganization Architectural Preservation date April 1986street & number Rm. 606, 118 No. Howard St. telephone (301) 396-4866city or town Baltimore state MD 21201

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust  
Shaw House  
21 State Circle  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401  
(301) 269-2438

CONTINUATION SHEET

B-2249

Mayfair Theatre

Section 7: Description

Above the marquee is the stone and terra cotta original elevation. Although obscured by the marquee, the central arch is probably mostly unaltered. The intermediary cornice is the general lower limit of the visible exterior. From this feature upwards, the rusticated stone walls are divided into three bays. The central bay has a group of three arched bays extending through two levels of window openings. The lower openings are simple rectangles and have been closed off, as are all the window openings in the facade. Above spandrels of guilloche carvings, the upper windows are in pairs, separated by carved T-shaped mullions. The columns separating the bays have Ionic capitals. The arches are outlined by cable moldings and the spandrels are ornamented by comic masks.

The central unit is enclosed on each side by projecting rusticated piers with ocular and aedicular windows in vertical arrangement. The side bays have two levels of hooded window openings, the upper ones arched. The cornice features a paneled frieze and elaborately carved pediments have carved tympana and scrolled tops flanking a lyre finial. The top level of the cornice has cartouches in the central bay and terminating the ends of the cornice. A copper tile-covered mansard is just visible above the cornice, with five oculi in the center. The north elevation, exposed by the demolition of the Stanley Theater in 1965, shows the characteristic roofline of the theater, with the gabled stage house at the west end of the lot.

The interior of the Mayfair has a lowered ceiling added in 1941 and the theater was completely remodeled in the early 1960's for a local premiere. The ceiling conceals the steeply raked original balcony levels in a horseshoe arc supported by iron columns with fan-shaped tops. The vault dome is painted in a romantic pictorial style.

CONTINUATION SHEET

B-2249

Mayfair Theatre

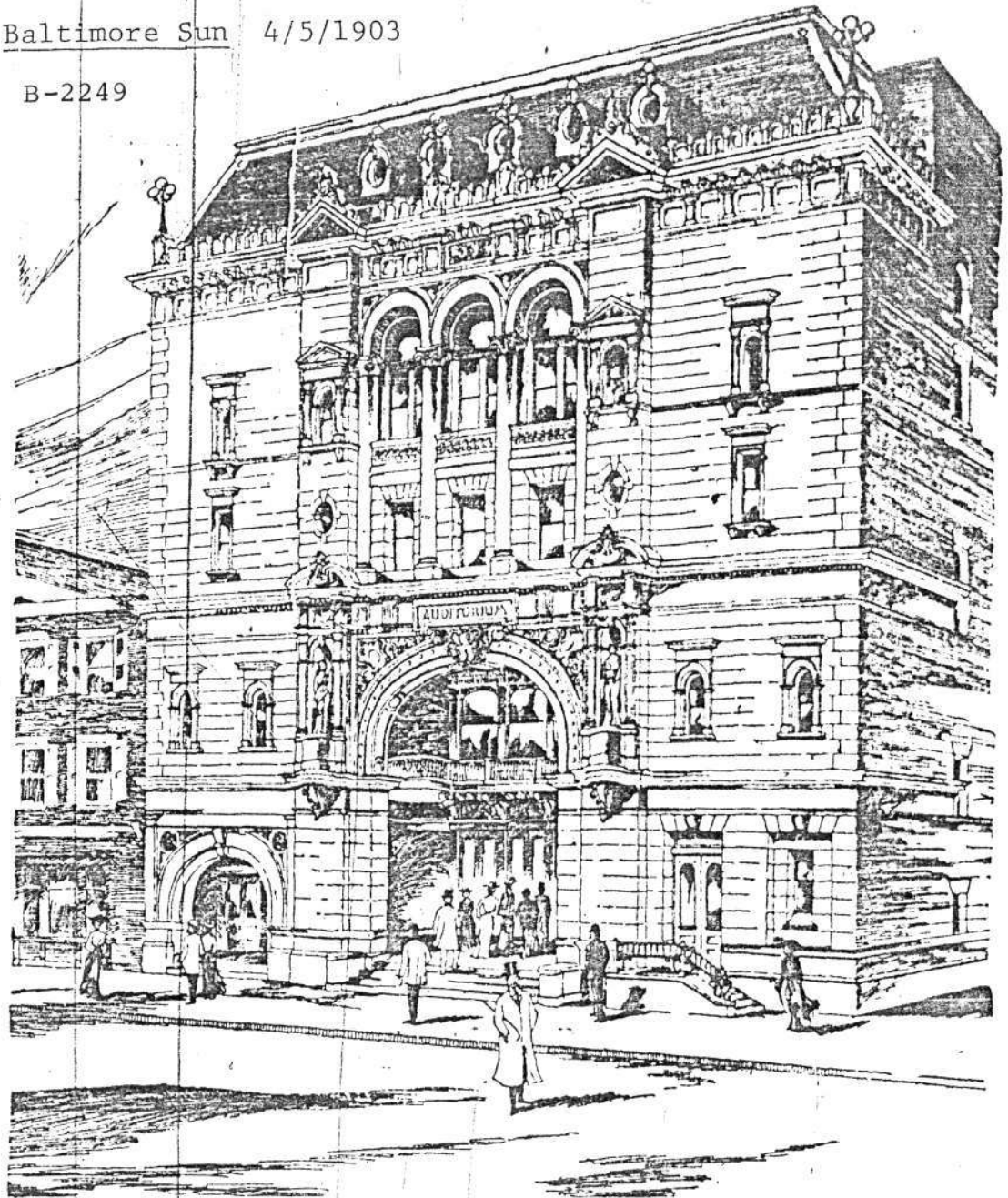
Section 8: Significance

Maryland Theatre on Franklin Street, the Auditorium Theatre reopened in late 1903 as a vaudeville house. Later the vaudeville acts shifted to the Maryland Theatre and the Auditorium featured mostly musicals and legitimate theater. By 1915, projection equipment had been installed and films were shown on a regular basis.

The Auditorium was sold separately from the other Kernan properties in 1940 and an extensive interior remodeling took place. The architect was E. Bernard Evander, who designed a dropped ceiling which concealed the romantically painted dome and steeply raked balconies. The reopening on January 31, 1941 marked its transition to a movie theater, the last stage act having appeared in 1939. The Turkish bath had probably closed before this remodeling, but it remained closed off under the theater.

The age of the movie palace in the 1940's and 1950's was embodied by several groupings of theaters along East Baltimore, West Fayette and North Eutaw Streets, and North Howard Street, where the Mayfair, the Stanley, and the Maryland, until its demolition in 1951, were the main attractions. The elaborate facades of these theaters mirrored the importance of movie-going in the post World War II period. The Mayfair received a further remodeling in 1963 just before the Baltimore opening of "Lawrence of Arabia". This alteration resulted in the present marquee and street level facade which obscured but did not destroy the original design. The interior has had several reworkings and the theater is currently closed for a further renovation.

B-2249



THE NEW AUDITORIUM THEATRE TO BE ERECTED BY MR. JAMES L. KERNAN

The new Auditorium which Manager James L. Kernan will erect on the site of his present playhouse, on North Howard street, will be a handsome and imposing structure, a picture of which is given above. It will have a seating capacity of 2,100.

The front of the building will be of granite and white terra cotta. It will tower 78 feet above the street and be about the same height as the Academy of Music. Under the first floor will be the splendidly-equipped Turkish bath and machinery hall, entrance to those being through the door to the right, or south, of the theatre entrance. A passageway will connect with the rathskeller and café now in course of construction on Franklin street as a part of the Maryland Theatre. The machinery hall will be faced with glazed brick walls. It will contain four electric generators, which will furnish 8,000 16 candle power incandescent lights for the entire new group of Kernan buildings. The Turkish bath will be modern in every particular, with a marble-lined plunge. The cost of fitting up this part of the building alone will be \$20,000. All the corridors and lobbies of the theatre will be wainscoted 8 feet high with Italian marble. The entire group of Kernan buildings will be fireproof.

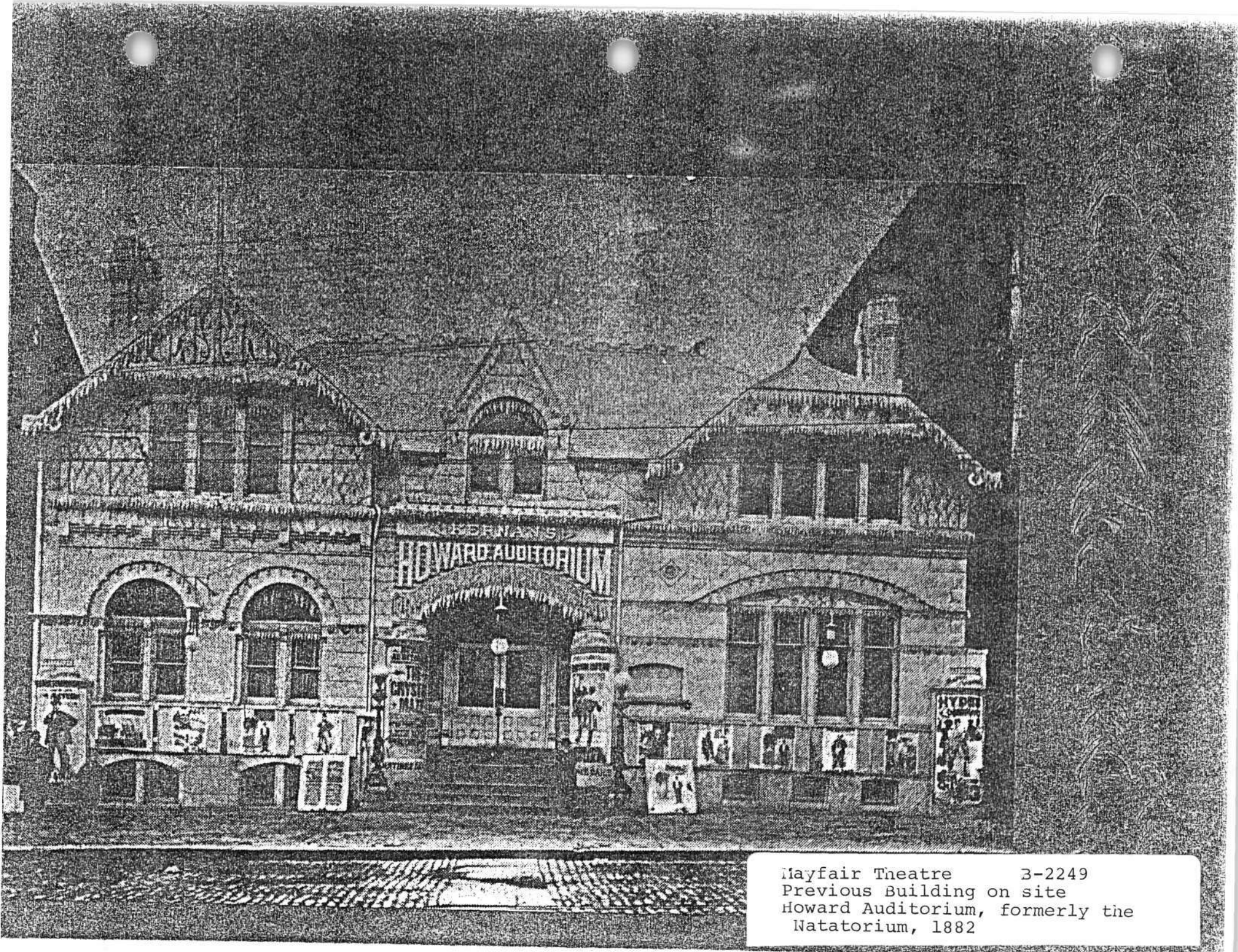
Under one roof two modern theatres—the Auditorium and the Maryland—built on the cantilever construction plan, eliminating all gallery posts, a rathskeller, 86 by 94 feet; a café, 86 by 94 feet; a grotto, 24 by 76 feet; a Turkish bath, 67 by 100 feet; a roof garden, 86 by 94 feet, and a machinery hall, 90 by 67 feet. The architects are the John D. Allen Company, of Philadelphia, and the contractors are Messrs. D. W. and Geo. H. Thomas, of this city. The new theatres will be ready for opening early in October.

The old Auditorium closed its doors last night and workmen will begin to demolish it this week. Over 4,000 persons attended the two performances of "Happy Hooligan" yesterday, almost every inch of space being occupied at night. When the curtain fell on the last scene it was promptly raised again and Mr. Kernan was called from his office. On behalf of the employes Mr. Chas. H. Knapp, Mr. Kernan's attorney, presented to the manager a magnificent floral horseshoe six feet high. Mr. Knapp briefly reviewed Mr. Kernan's successful career as a manager and spoke of his enterprise in spending nearly half a million dollars in a new cluster of theatre buildings. Mr. Kernan expressed his thanks, after which Miss Roberta Keene sang "Auld Lang Syne," the "Happy Hooligan" company and the audience joining in the chorus. Mr. Kernan

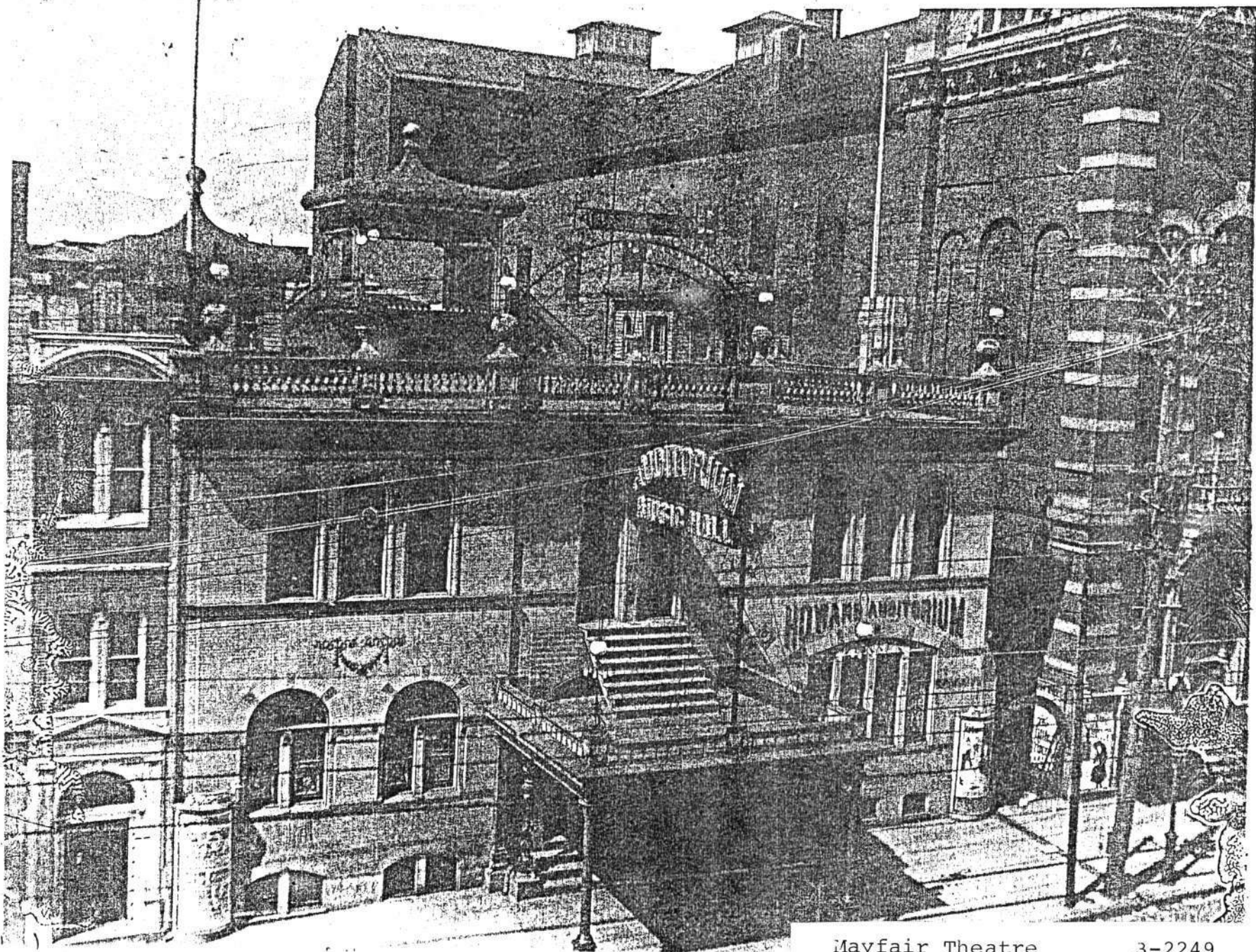
Business Manager Frederick C. Schanberger, Treasurer L. A. Ferrandini, Doorkeeper William Tubman and Patrolman Harry Allen, whose post includes the theatre, were kept busy for some time shaking hands with their friends.

The Auditorium building was erected in 1882 by the natatorium company for use as a swimming school, but the enterprise was not successful. For some years afterward the building was controlled and occupied by the Oratorio Society. It was sold at auction in December, 1891, and purchased by Messrs. D. L. Bartlett, Otto Sutro and Dr. J. J. Chisolm for \$15,000. The next day Mr. Kernan purchased it and conducted various amusement enterprises there for several years, including an Eden Musee, an ice palace and summer operas, in the latter of which Jennie Winston was the principal attraction. About seven years ago Mr. Kernan elaborately refitted the building, added the palm garden and made it a straight vaudeville house.

A number of well-known actors and actresses have appeared at the Auditorium, including Alice Fisher, Frank Mayo, Vesta Tilly, Clara Morris, Rose Coghlan, Maudie Barrymore, Robert Hilliard, Gus Williams, Weber and Fields, Tony Pastor, John Mason, Mattie Monks and Marie Jansen.



Mayfair Theatre 3-2249  
Previous Building on site  
Howard Auditorium, formerly the  
Natatorium, 1882



Mayfair Theatre 3-2249  
Previous building on site  
Howard Auditorium as remodeled, 1891

**Maryland Historical Trust**  
**State Historic Sites Inventory Form**

Survey No. B-2249  
 Magi No. 0422495724  
 DOE   yes no

**1. Name** (indicate preferred name)

historic Mayfair Theater

and/or common Matatorium, Howard Auditorium, Auditorium

**2. Location**

street & number 508 N. Howard Street    not for publication

city, town Baltimore    vicinity of    congressional district

state Maryland county    city   

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<u>  </u> district	<u>  </u> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<u>  </u> agriculture <u>  </u> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<u>  </u> unoccupied	<u>  </u> commercial <u>  </u> park
<u>  </u> structure	<u>  </u> both	<u>  </u> work in progress	<u>  </u> educational <u>  </u> private residence
<u>  </u> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment <u>  </u> religious
<u>  </u> object	<u>  </u> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<u>  </u> government <u>  </u> scientific
	<u>  </u> being considered	<u>  </u> yes: unrestricted	<u>  </u> industrial <u>  </u> transportation
	<u>  </u> not applicable	<u>  </u> no	<u>  </u> military <u>  </u> other:

**4. Owner of Property** (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name   

street & number    telephone no.:   

city, town    state and zip code   

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Baltimore City Courthouse    liber

street & number Calvert and Fayette Streets    folio

city, town Baltimore    state Maryland

**6. Representation in Existing** Historical Surveys

title CBD West

date 1976    federal    state    county    local

depository for survey records Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation

## 7. Description

Survey No. B-2249

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date of move _____

Prepare both a summary paragraph and a general description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

### Summary

The Mayfair Theater is located on N. Howard Street, and is one of two surviving elements of a "theatrical complex" which consisted of two theaters and a hotel. It was originally constructed in 1870, and has since undergone numerous remodelings (in 1890, 1903, 1941, and 1963). At present the Mayfair reflects many different design phases.

On the exterior, the ornate granite facade and theatrical embellishments can be attributed to the 1903 alterations. Although little is known of the J.D. Allen Company, the firm responsible for those alterations, their symmetrical design for the building, exuberance of detail, enriched moldings and figure sculpture, characterize a firm versed in the theatrical Beaux Arts style. (See Figure 1.)

On the interior, the Mayfair is a maze of stairwells, corridors, balconies, and dressing rooms which date from various periods of its construction history. An article written by theater expert Robert K. Headley, and published in a 1977 issue of Marquee Magazine describes the interior spaces much as they exist today. (See Attachment A.) Headley's observations as well as his knowledge of the theater's history provide a thorough account, and the following text merely elaborates on his observations.

### The Interior

Today, the Mayfair's interior contains vestiges of the original Natatorium (the German health club which originally occupied the building), as well as the extensive interior alterations which were completed in 1890, 1903, 1941 and 1963.

Descriptions of the original Natatorium's interior and its subsequent 1890 alteration and reuse as a theater are scarce. However, the early white tile swimming pool remains today in the lower depths of the theater. The bathing facility is reached via

a dark stairway, through a decorated arched doorway, down another flight of stairs and along a passageway which at one time led to the Congress Hotel and the Maryland Theatre. (This passage is now blocked in.) Along the passageway, stenciled directional labels remain on overhead arches. The swimming pool itself remains intact and the space is unadorned, except for the marble which borders the pool. (Rubble was piled into the pool during one of the 20th century renovations.) Early shower facilities, massage and steam rooms, and dressing rooms surround the pool. Through 1907, the facility was used as a Turkish bath and served as an added attraction of the Auditorium Theater.

The 1890 alterations were essentially of the interior to make the building functionable and suitable as a theater. It is difficult to determine if any of the existing features of the theater can be attributed to this period. No descriptions of the work were located beyond the fact that interior remodeling was done.

The most significant early interior space dates to 1903. At this time, owner James Kernan remodeled building and named it the Auditorium. It seems apparent that much of architect J.D. Allen's work from this period remains. A maze-like route through the existing projection booth leads to the second floor balcony, where much of Allen's work can be found. (See Figure 2.) When the balcony was closed off in 1941 and the ground floor ceiling lowered, this second-floor balcony became unused space. The steep balcony is in a stepped, curved arrangement. Wooden bench ends remain at the terminus of some of these curved rows, indicating the location of benches which have since been removed. The center of the balcony is highlighted by a frescoed dome, with traces of figures with bright, round, rosy, cherub faces and female figures looking down from its height. Elegant bell-shaped or fanned columns--turn-of-the-century adaptations of the High Gothic fan vault shape--define the curved edge of the balcony. Interlaced diagonal bands decorate the upper half of their shafts. A curved acanthus leaf molding runs along the ceiling on either side of the columns, delineating as well the round edge of the dome. The dome space is marred by guywires inserted to support the false ceiling below.

In 1941, when E. Bernard Evander converted the Auditorium into the Mayfair movie house, he remodeled the lobby. Although it is difficult to determine, it seems that his configuration of the lobby remains. The decor of the lobby presumably dates to the 1963 remodeling. At present the lobby is a deep, but very narrow, space that meets the concession stand. Two side doors lead into the theater. Once inside the ground floor of the auditorium, the sense of vaudeville and live theater are lost.

B-2249

Evander's 1941 remodeling included gutting the old auditorium between the dressing rooms and front entrance of the theater, from the first floor to the bottom of the second balcony (where he installed a false ceiling).<sup>1</sup> The original proscenium has been removed and the present one was built for the movie screen. The auditorium as it stands today is sparsely ornamented; perhaps the descending chair rail that follows the slant of the floor down towards the screen, and the stepped ceiling are the highlights.

FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Marquee Magazine, v. 9, no. 4, 1977, p. 20.



Association of Baltimore City." The Natatorium was a two-story, Swiss Chalet-styled, brick bathhouse. The bathing facility was 60 by 244 feet. (See Figure 3.) A contemporary advertisement described the Natatorium as "...a source of healthful aquatic (sic) exercises, and furnishing instruction in the delightful and most necessary art of swimming."<sup>1</sup>

James Lawrence Kernan, a wealthy philanthropist and theater man, purchased the Natatorium in 1890 and remodeled it to accommodate a legitimate theater. The major remodelings at this time were carried out on the interior. However, the Swiss Chalet motifs were removed and replaced by icicle decorations that hung from the cornice, windows, roof frame and doorway. The newly styled ice palace theater, was named the Howard Auditorium. It appears that no structural alterations were conducted on the exterior. (See Figure 4.)

An advertisement in the 1902 city directory heralded the Howard Auditorium as a model theater with beautiful embellishments, elaborate decorations, and artistic draperies. The shows consisted of strictly high class and refined attractions, including comedies, operettas, select vaudeville, minstrelsy, and novel entertainments. It was also boasted as the most brilliantly lighted theater in America with 2,500 incandescent and arc lights. The advertisement also draws attention to the luxurious Art Gallery to the right of the lobby containing a rare and costly exhibit of fine paintings, rich bronzes and other exquisite art designs.

In 1902 James Kernan began to formulate an extensive plan for a "theatrical complex" of two theaters and a hotel. It was to be the "theatrical blockbuster of all time for Baltimore - the Million Dollar Enterprise".<sup>2</sup> Kernan's dream to provide his audience with every facility possible for their amusement, comfort and entertainment was accomplished by his 1903 remodeling of the Auditorium theater and construction of an adjacent hotel and second theater. The design of all three buildings was done by J.D. Allen and Company of Philadelphia. Kernan had originally planned to raze the existing Auditorium and build a new theater to become a part of his "theatrical complex," but, perhaps because costs became prohibitive, he settled on remodeling the Auditorium. Consequently, the Auditorium was extensively altered and received a new facade in 1903. (See Figure 5.)

"The Grand opening of the Million Dollar Triple Enterprise took place on Monday, 4 September 1905, and it was billed, with the normal theatrical modesty, as the 'greatest combination of

buildings in the world'. Maybe it was; within the three buildings there were 120 hotel rooms, a barber shop, a \$50,000 Turkish bath, a rathskeller, an art gallery, an oriental banquet room, a billiard parlor, 3,600 theatre seats, and a huge, underground electrical generating plant called Machinery Hall. 2-story Machinery Hall was located below the rathskeller and provided electricity for all three buildings." 3

(See Figure 6)

This was the heyday of live theater in Baltimore. This was the place Baltimoreans went when they wanted theatrical entertainment. Theater owners and developers during the industry's infancy subscribed to a prevalent idea that "...in a sense, these theaters are a social safety valve in that the public can partake of the same luxuries as the rich, and use them to the same full extent."<sup>4</sup> The Kernan complex fulfilled this ideal.

Until the completion of the Maryland Theatre (the second theater in Kernan's complex), vaudeville acts had been featured at the Auditorium. As a new and dazzling stage, the Maryland seemed the more attractive--and appropriate--space for the stage acts, and became devoted exclusively to high class vaudeville attractions.

A City directory advertisement in 1907 proudly declares the Auditorium as "Baltimore's Coziest Playhouse," in which the patron could be entertained with musical comedy, spectacular, extravaganza, and comic opera. (See Figure 7.) During intermission or before or after the show, amusement could be found at a magnificent \$50,000 Turkish bath (the finest and most luxurious in America), a rathskeller, an art gallery, an oriental banquet room, and billiard and pool parlours.

In 1912, the death of Kernan and managerial difficulties overshadowed the theater's early success. During the decades of the 1920s and 30s stock shows --popular but not prosperous-- appeared at the Auditorium with key attractions such as Spencer Tracy Pat O'Brien.<sup>5</sup> Hard times fell on the Auditorium like so many theaters across the country in the late twenties and early thirties. Attempts to keep the Auditorium open included legitimate shows, two-a-day movies with a large orchestra, a political convention, and lectures on cooking techniques. The theater closed in 1939.

C.W. Hicks, a theater operator in Baltimore purchased the building in 1940, and began plans to convert the theater into a

movie house. He commissioned local architect E. Bernard Evander, who preserved much of the original building exterior. However, on the interior:

to create a new theater within, the old auditorium was gutted between the dressing rooms and the front entrance between the first floor and the bottom of the second balcony, and a new proscenium for the screen was built. A false ceiling was installed to bring the towering vault of the Auditorium lower. A new floor was laid and the lobby area was completely remodeled. Incredibly, the original ceiling, projection booth, second balcony, dressing room area, and basement are virtually intact. On the exterior of the theater, the major changes were the addition of a massive marquee and the modernization of the front entrance beneath it."<sup>6</sup>

In 1941 the movie theater was reopened as the Mayfair. It was technically ahead of many theaters in the country. It was one of the first theaters equipped to broadcast live television productions and to accommodate the new three-dimensional sound. It also featured "black light" which illuminated designs on the carpet and "airplane seats."<sup>7</sup> The movie house was operated by the Hicks Circuit until 1957 when it was purchased by the JF Theatres (who have operated it since). By 1960 the Mayfair had been equipped with 70mm equipment. The Mayfair underwent extensive remodelings in 1963 for the Baltimore premiere of "Lawrence of Arabia." In this renovation, "the front of the building as well as the marquee and lobby were redone. The inner lobby was paneled with polished walnut. A new curtain of tangerine red was installed, and the auditorium walls were covered with green and blue cloth. New deep red carpeting was laid, and new glass box offices flanked the black tile front. The main entrance was formed of three large, circular doorways framed in gilt metal."<sup>8</sup>

#### Architects

The architect of the original building, the Natatorium on Howard Street, is not known. The architect under James Kernan's guidance in 1890 who redesigned the Natatorium into the Auditorium with ice palace motifs is also unknown.

In 1903 the extensive remodeling of the Auditorium was done by the Philadelphia firm of J.D. Allen and Company. John D. Allen, who was an architect and an engineer, specialized in interior art decoration and theater work (according to business directories

issued in the 1890s).<sup>9</sup> An extensive entry in the Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects lists theaters to his credit in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Brooklyn, New York City, Atlantic City and Baltimore were designed or altered by Allen.

Local architect E. Bernard Evander was commissioned to work on the Auditorium in the 1940s when it was converted into a movie house. Evander was considered a top "theater architect" during this era; he studied at Glasgow University in Scotland. Evander was responsible for the design of nine theaters in Baltimore, and remodeled the Hampden and the Mayfair theaters. Born in Sweden in 1893, he died in Baltimore in 1975.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

It is unclear at this point whether the interior of the Mayfair Theater would contribute to a nomination of the entire structure to the National Register. Clearly, the historical significance of the interior is strong because of its role in Baltimore's theatrical history and place in the heyday of early vaudeville theater. However, the integrity of the interior spaces is seriously compromised.

The extensive 1940 and 1963 alterations made to the Mayfair's ground floor interior have seriously eroded its significance. The old auditorium was gutted, a new proscenium was built, the first balcony removed, and a false ceiling installed. The existing auditorium retains almost no sense of its earlier original design, and there is no particular design merit or historic significance to the existing design. The apparent resulting lack of integrity is a weakness to any proposed National Register nomination if it is irreversible. A careful analysis of its current condition is therefore recommended.

Although a case could be made that the remaining interior elements at other levels of the theater have sufficient integrity to be significant, it is impossible to predict how any review board would react to such a nomination.

The interior significance is, as well, inexorably tied to the significance of the building's handsome facade, which (with the exception of its marquee) is little changed since 1903. The entire structure should be evaluated as a whole, and the current inventory which CHAP is conducting of the exterior will assist in this effort.

As a general statement, the most significant interior spaces are:  
1) the early Turkish bath at the basement level which may survive

from the original Natatorium structure, and 2) extant elements of the elegant second balcony space which dates from the 1890 conversion to a vaudeville theater. Both spaces have merit--the baths as reminders of the original Natatorium facility and as part of Kernan's complex, and the second-level balcony as a glimpse of the early vaudeville theater and the elegance early theater architects embellished upon their design. Other early elements of the theater survive (including the dressing rooms, etc.) which make varying degrees of contribution to the interior significance.

#### FOOTNOTES

- 1 Marquee Magazine, v. 9, no. 4, 1977, p. 18.
- 2 Ibid., p. 19.
- 3 Ibid., p. 19.
- 4 Exit, p. 13.
- 5 Exit, p. 96.
- 6 Marquee Magazine, p. 20.
- 7 Exit, p. 96.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects, p. 7.



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Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation. Vertical files.

Enoch Pratt Free Library, Maryland Room. Vertical, map and photo files; books.

Library of Congress, Maps and Geography Division.

Maryland Historical Society, Prints and Photographs Division.

Peale Museum, Prints and Photographs Collection.



PHOTO: William Lebovich

FIGURE 1

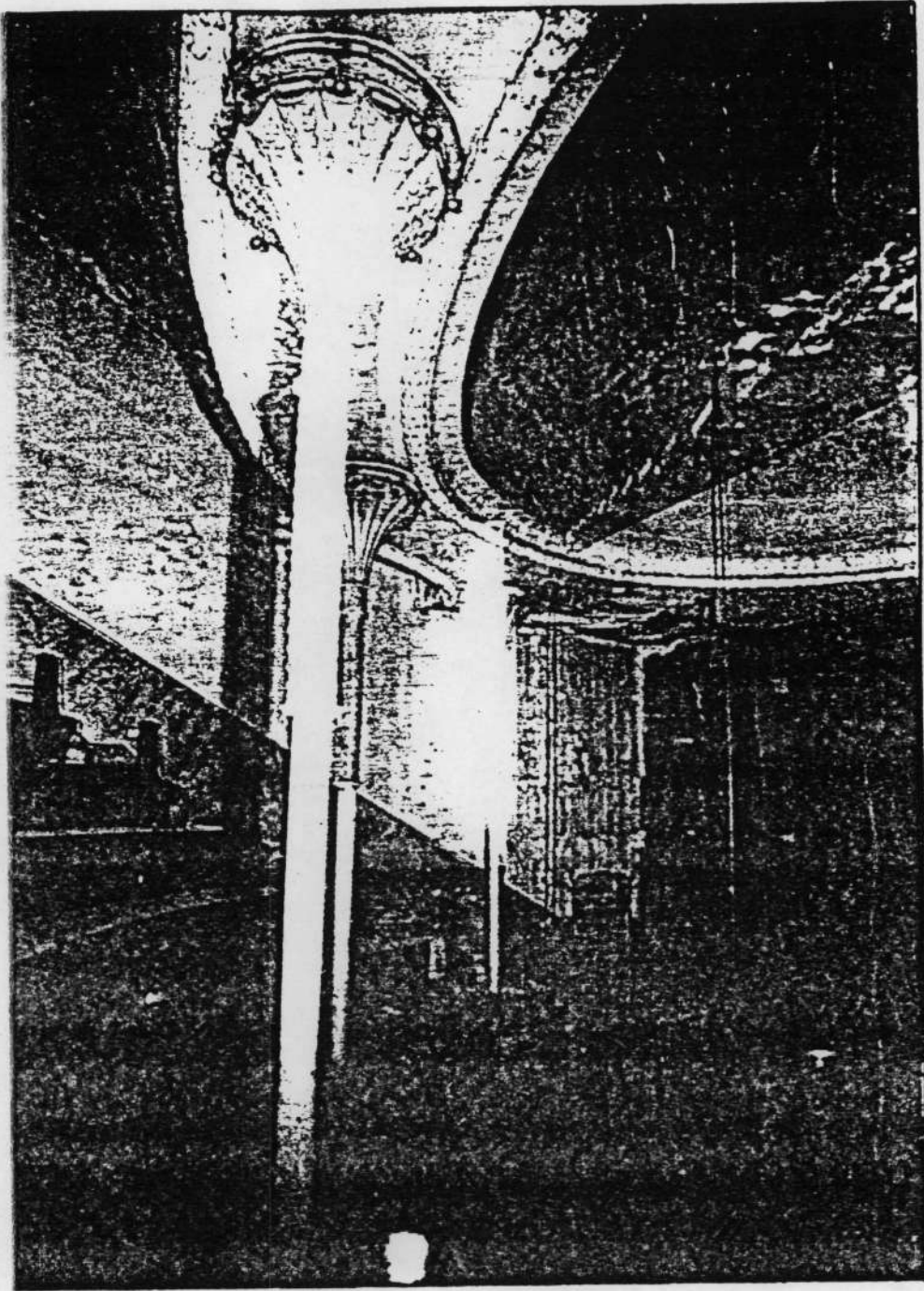


PHOTO: William Lebovich

FIGURE 2

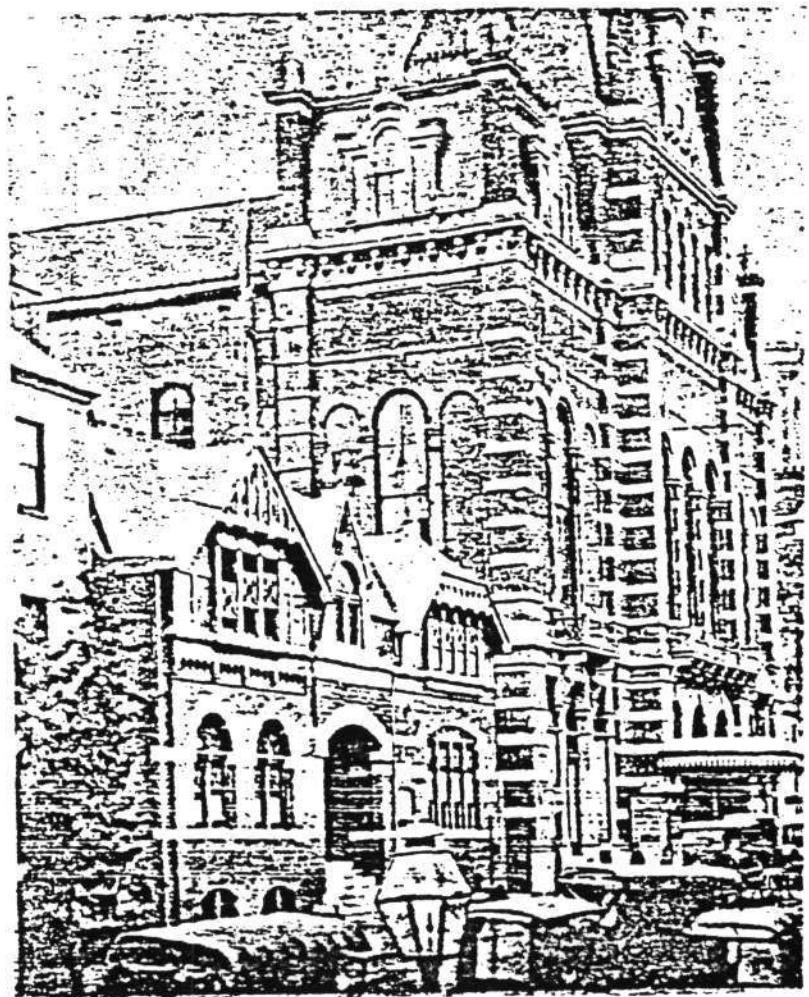


Photo courtesy of Peale Museum

FIGURE 3  
The Natatorium (and the Academy of Music) 1890

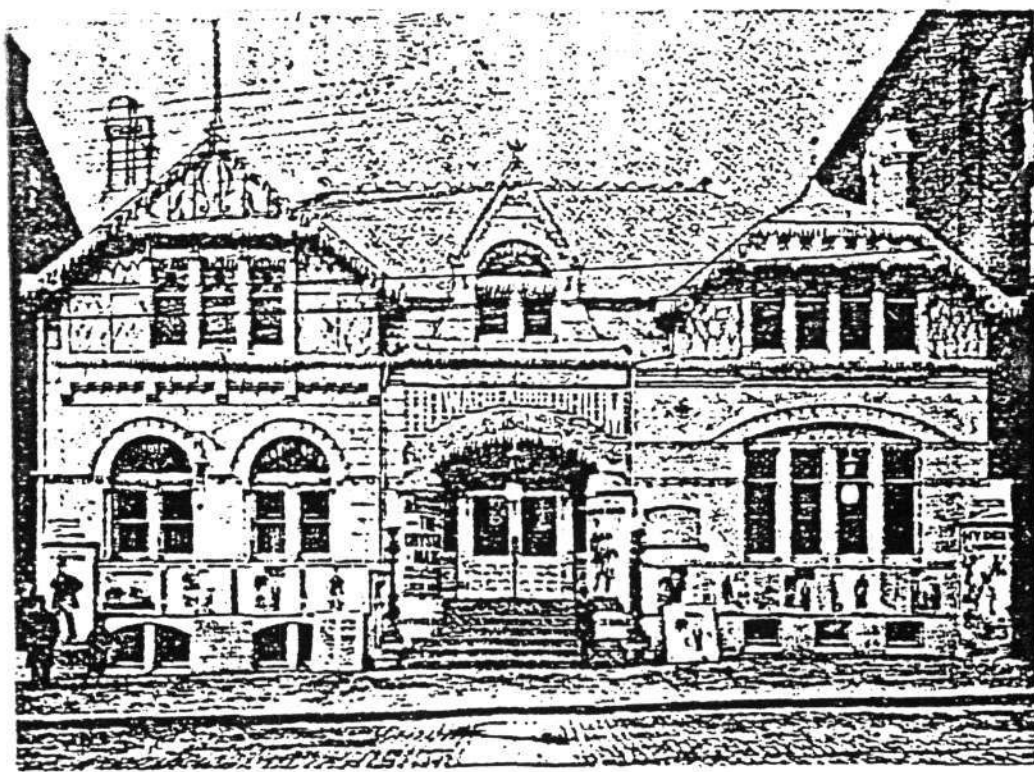
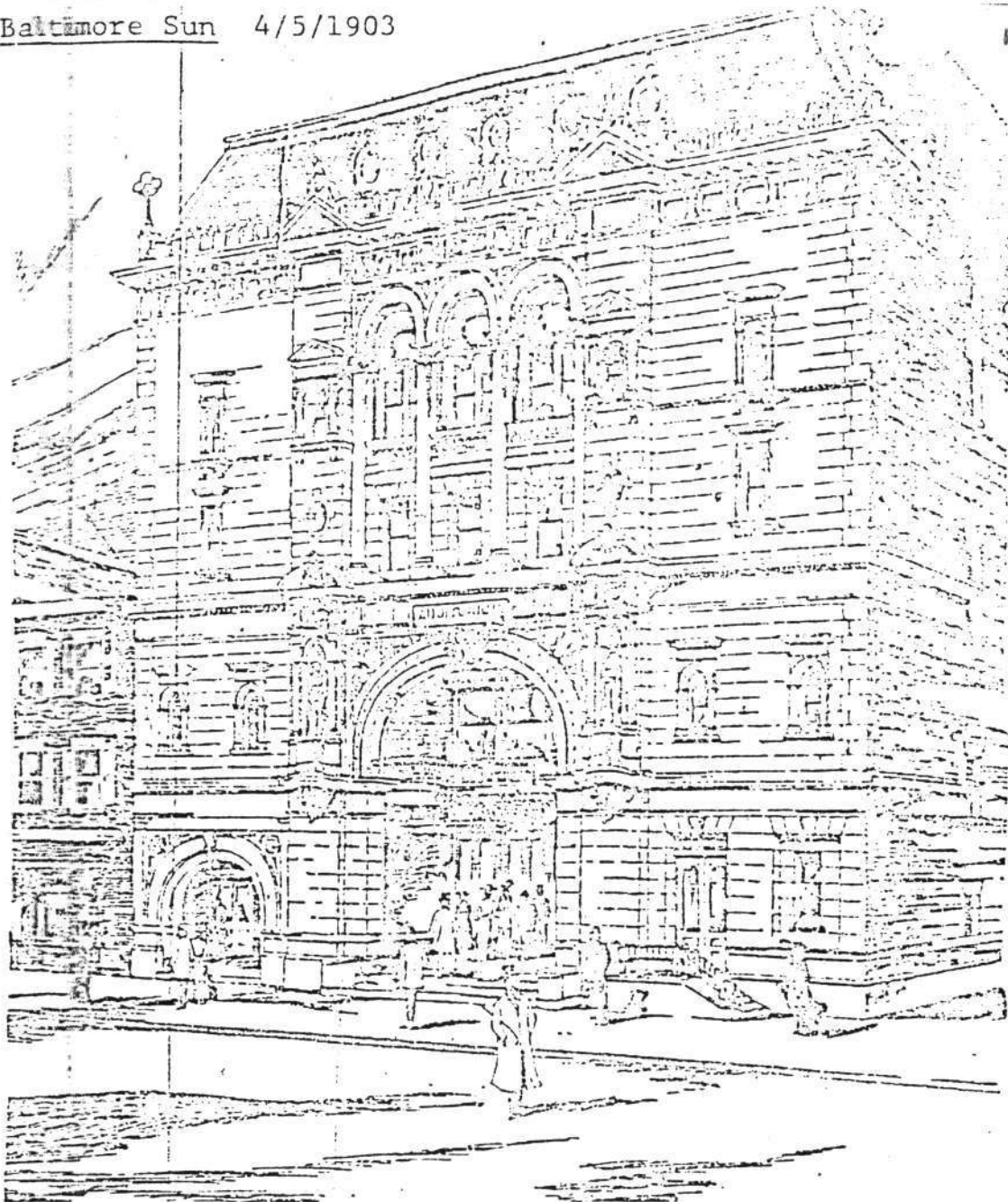


Photo courtesy of Peale Museum

FIGURE 4  
Hernan's Howard Auditorium, about 1892



**THE NEW AUDITORIUM THEATRE TO BE ERECTED BY MR. JAMES L. KERNAN**

The new Auditorium which Manager James L. Kernan will erect on the site of his present playhouse, on North Howard street, will be a handsome and imposing structure, a picture of which is given above. It will have a seating capacity of 2,100.

The front of the building will be of granite and white terra cotta. It will tower 78 feet above the street and be about the same height as the Academy of Music. Under the first floor will be the splendidly-equipped Turkish bath and machinery hall, entrance to these being through the door to the right, or south, of the theatre entrance. A passageway will connect with the rathskeller and cafe now in course of construction on Franklin street as a part of the Maryland Theatre. The machinery hall will be faced with glazed brick walls. It will contain four electric generators, which will furnish 6,000 35-candle power incandescent lights for the entire new group of Kernan buildings. The Turkish bath will be modern in every particular, with a marble-lined plunge. The cost of fitting up this part of the building alone will be \$20,000. All the corridors and lobbies of the theatre will be wainscoted 8 feet high with Italian marble. The entire group of Kernan buildings will be fireproof.

For one roof two modern theatres—the Auditorium and the Maryland, built on the cantilever construction plan, eliminating all gallery posts, a rathskeller, 80 by 94 feet; a cafe, 86 by 94 feet; a grotto, 24 by 70 feet; a Turkish bath, 67 by 100 feet; a roof garden, 84 by 94 feet, and a machinery hall, 30 by 67 feet. The architects are the John D. Allen Company, of Philadelphia, and the contractors are Messrs. D. W. and Geo. H. Thomas, of this city. The new theatre will be ready for opening early in October.

The old Auditorium closed its doors last night and workmen will begin to demolish it this week. Over 4,000 persons attended the two performances of "Happy Hooligan" yesterday, almost every inch of space being occupied at night. When the curtain fell on the last scene it was promptly raised again and Mr. Kernan was called from his office. On behalf of the employees Mr. Chas. H. Knapp, Mr. Kernan's attorney, presented to the manager a magnificent floral horseshoe six feet high. Mr. Knapp briefly reviewed Mr. Kernan's successful career as a manager and spoke of his enterprise in spending nearly half a million dollars in a new cluster of theatre buildings. Mr. Kernan expressed his thanks, after which Miss Roberta Keane sang "Auld Lang Syne," the "Happy Hooligan" company and the

Business Manager Frederick C. Schaefer, Treasurer L. A. Ferrandini, Secretary William Tubman and Patroness Harry Allen, whose post includes the theatre, were kept busy for some time shaking hands with their friends.

The Auditorium building was erected in 1882 by the Auditorium company for use as a swimming school, but the enterprise was not successful. For some years afterward the building was controlled and occupied by the Oratorio Society. It was sold at auction in December, 1891, and purchased by Messrs. D. L. Bartlett, Otto Sutro and Dr. J. J. Chisolm for \$15,000. The next day Mr. Kernan purchased it and conducted various amusement enterprises there for several years, including an Eden Musee, an ice palace and summer operas, in the latter of which Jennie Winston was the principal attraction. About seven years ago Mr. Kernan elaborately refitted the building, added the palm garden and made it a straight vaudeville house.

A number of well-known actors and actresses have appeared at the Auditorium, including Allen Fisher, Frank Mayo, Vera Tilly, Clara Morris, Rosa Coghlan, Maudie Barrymore, Robert Hillyard, Gus Williams, Weber and Fields, Tony Pastor, John M. ...

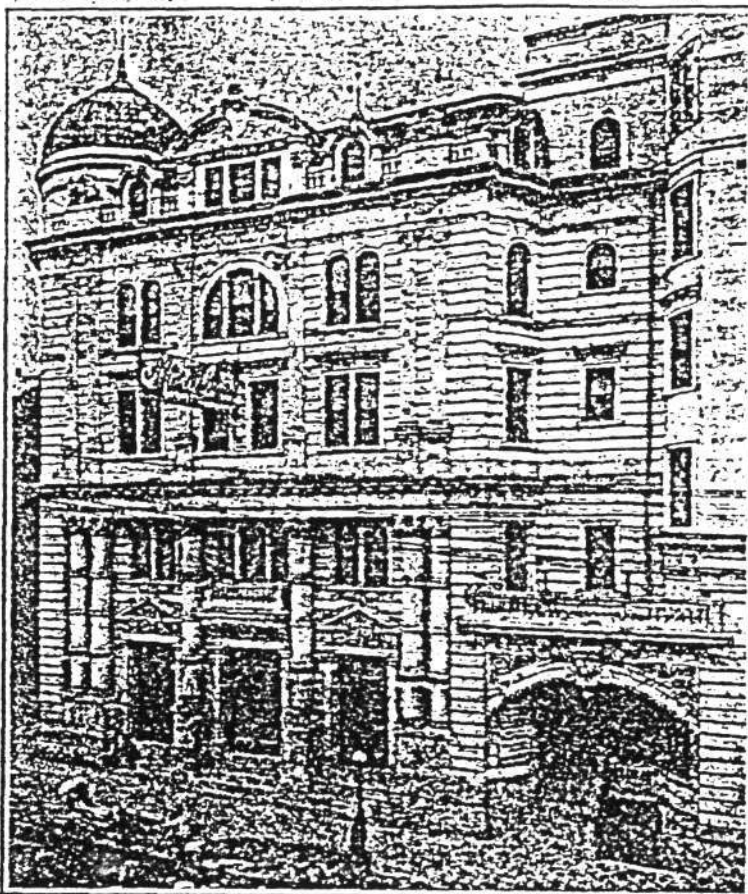


FIGURE 6  
The Auditorium after remodeling in 1903

PHOTO: C.M. Kepner Pratt Photo File

B-2249

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MATINEE DAILY

Prices 25, 50 and 75c

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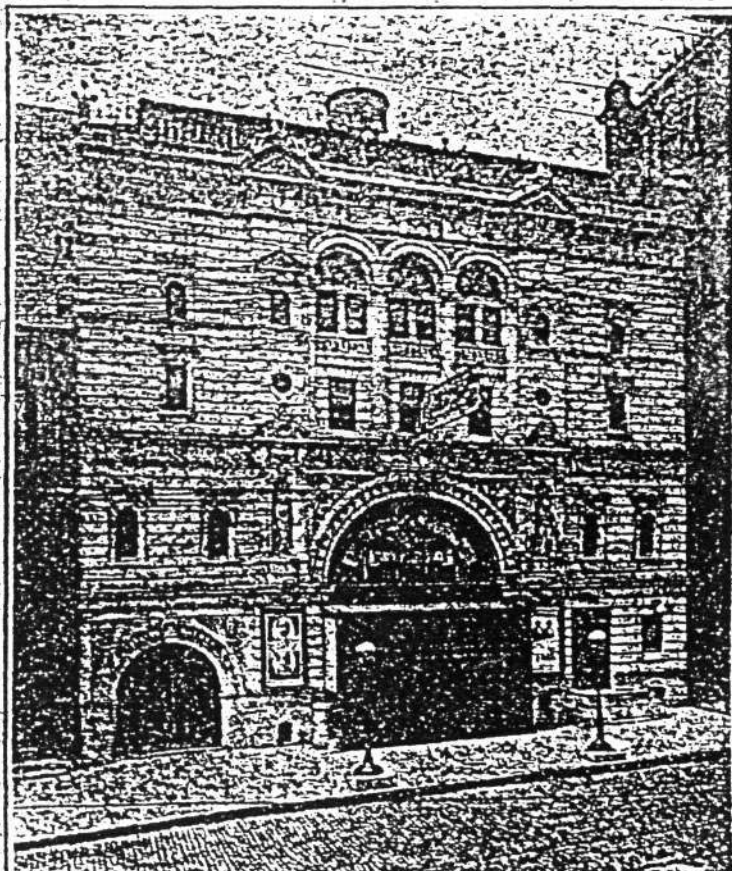
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**Spectacular**  
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Magnificent \$50,000 Turkish  
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# Natatorium Auditorium Mayfair

Baltimore, Md.

By:

Robert K. Headley, Jr.

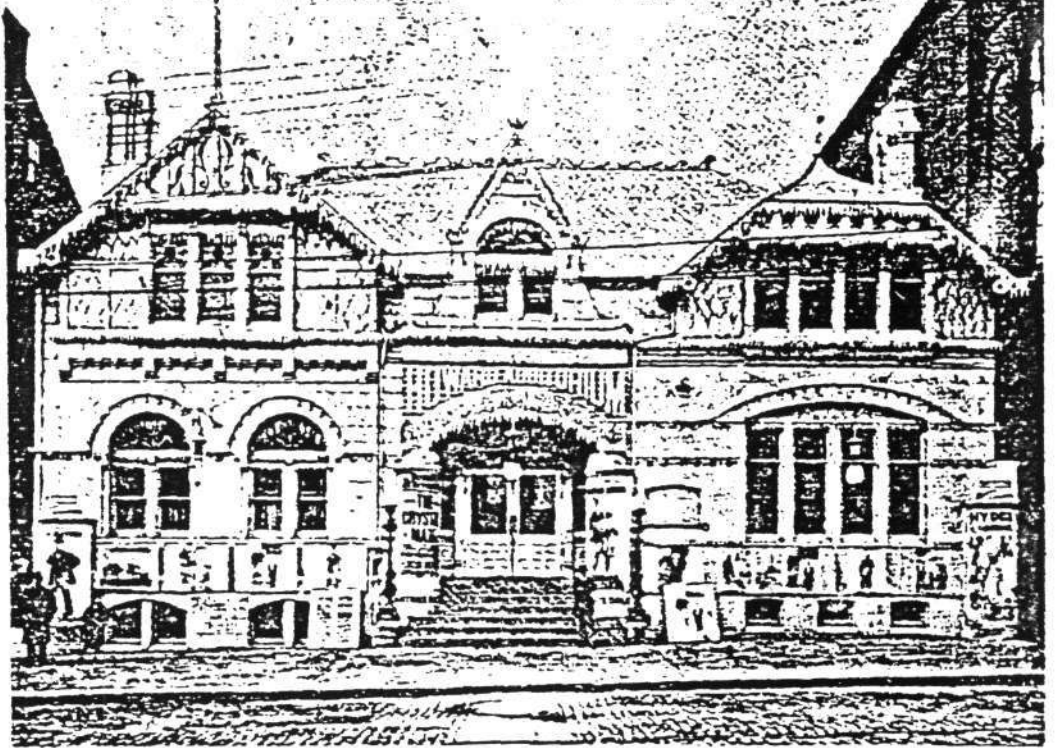


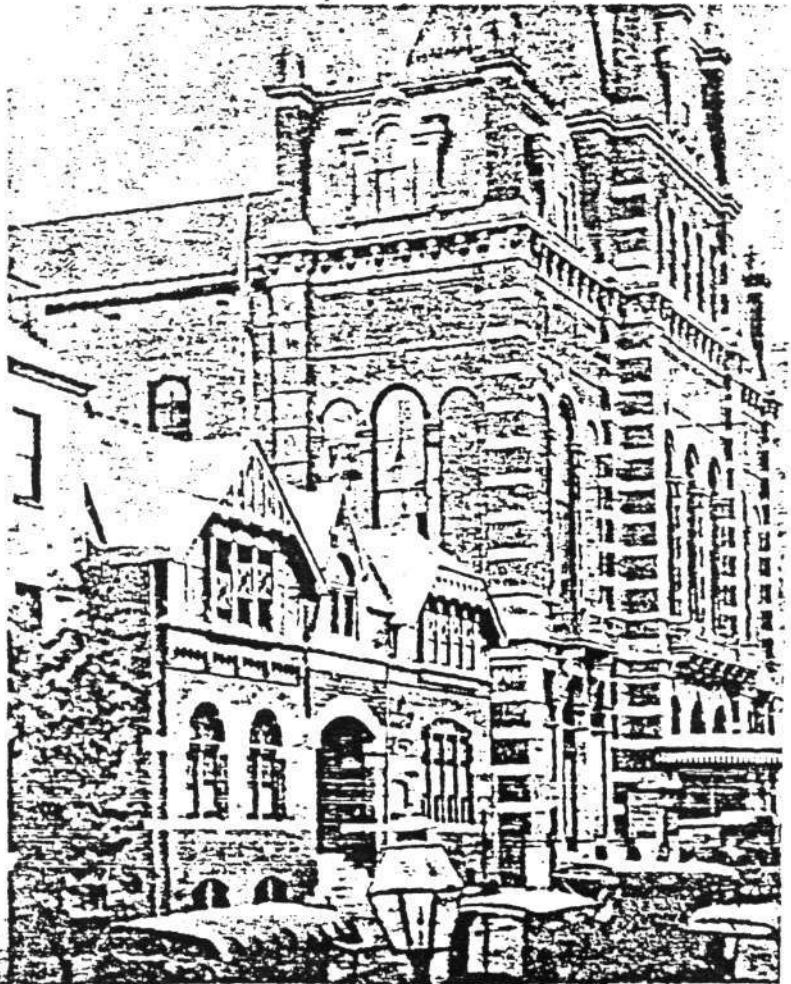
Photo courtesy: Peale Museum, Balto.

The Baltimore MAYFAIR I, (1) formerly the MAYFAIR and before that the AUDITORIUM, is a delightful example of a much remodeled theater which still holds ornamental and structural secrets of its past. A recent examination of the building revealed elements of its one-hundred year history many of which are intact. In this article the building will be called the Natatorium, AUDITORIUM or MAYFAIR depending on the time being discussed.

The MAYFAIR I dates from 1941, but the building in which it is located dates back to 1905 with portions even older. Around 1870, an association called "The Natatorium and Physical Culture Association of Baltimore City" was formed by Dr. James A. Stewart and others. They selected a spot on North Howard St. — somewhat north of the main business district — and built the Natatorium — a 60 by 244 foot bathing house and swimming school. A contemporary ad described the Natatorium as "... a hygienic agency, supplying with the most approved means, a source of healthful aquatic (sic) exercises, and furnishing instruction in the delightful and most necessary art of swimming." In an 1890 photo the Natatorium appears as a two-story Swiss chalet-like building. In that same year, James Lawrence Kernan, Confederate veteran, wealthy philanthropist, and theater man, obtained the Natatorium building and converted it into a legitimate theater — the HOWARD AUDITORIUM. Kernan's first remodeling was of the interior; then, in 1903, the building was drastically altered. Judging from a comparison of 1890 and 1903 photos the remodeling involved the addition of another floor and doubtlessly considerable internal modifications. The exterior was originally made to resemble an ice palace with icicles hanging from the ledges, but these were removed in the more conservative 1903 building. As early as 1902, James Kernan was planning his greatest project — the theatrical blockbuster of all time for Baltimore — the Million Dollar Enterprise (2). He decided on the area adjacent to the AUDITORIUM for the complex of two theaters and a luxury hotel. The cornerstone of the MARYLAND Theater was laid on 19 March 1903, and seven months later the theater opened. The

Above: Kernan's Howard Auditorium, on Howard Street, about 1892. [Note the curious icicle decorations.] Below: The Natatorium and the famous Academy of Music in 1890. Admirers of street lights should note the gas light in the foreground and the clusters before the Academy.

Photo courtesy: Peale Museum, Balto.



1. It was renamed MAYFAIR I in 1973 when the LITTLE Theater across the street was rechristened MAYFAIR II.

2. Around this time, Kernan was interested in nine other theaters — the HOLIDAY STREET, FRONT STREET, MONUMENTAL, and BIJOU in Baltimore; the LYCEUM, EMPIRE, and LAFAYETTE OPERA HOUSE in Washington, D.C. and the LAFAYETTE Theater in St. Louis, Mo.

old AUDITORIUM opened its final year on 12 September 1904 with the William A. Brady production of "Foxy Grandpa" starring Joseph Hart and Carrie Demar. It was then described by manager Kernan as "without question the coziest and prettiest theater of its size in America." Two years later the Hotel Kernan and the new AUDITORIUM Theater were opened. All three buildings were designed by J. D. Allen and Co. of Philadelphia and built by D. W. and G. H. Thomas of Baltimore. Unlike the rejuvenated AUDITORIUM, the MARYLAND Theater and the hotel were built new from the ground up.

The grand opening of the Million Dollar Triple Enterprise took place on Monday, 4 September 1905, and it was billed, with normal theatrical modesty, as "the greatest combination of buildings in the world." Maybe it was; within the three buildings there were 120 hotel rooms, a barber shop, a \$50,000 Turkish bath, a rathskeller, an art gallery, an oriental banquet room, a billiard parlor, 3,600 theater seats, and a huge, underground electrical generating plant called Machinery Hall. Two-story Machinery Hall was located below the rathskeller, and provided electricity for all three buildings. Tours of the hall were available, and patrons could admire the white-uniformed mechanics and attendants who operated the generators.

The grand opening show at the MARYLAND featured Keith's vaudeville — including the latest Kinetograph moving pictures (3) — and the AUDITORIUM presented Mason and Mason in the musical comedy "Fritz and Snitz." Seats at both theaters sold for 15c, 25c, 50c, and 75c. The Chevalier Albert L. Guille, late leading tenor of the Heinrich Grand Opera Co., sang nightly in the hotel dining room and rathskeller palm garden.

Before the MARYLAND had been built, vaudeville was the fare at the AUDITORIUM, but with the coming of the MARYLAND, vaudeville was transferred to the newer theater. The AUDITORIUM went to musicals and legitimate shows. The management of the AUDITORIUM was shared between Mr. Kernan and veteran theater man George W. Rife. In 1909 it was leased to the Shubert Organization. After Kernan died, in 1912, his close friend Frederick C. Schanberger became the president of the Kernan theater interests. A bitter fight occurred in September 1913 when the merged Klaw and Erlanger - Shubert booking offices signed an agreement by which their attractions would no longer be presented at the AUDITORIUM, but would be placed either at Charles E. Ford's GRAND OPERA House — better known as FORD's Theater — or at the ACADEMY OF MUSIC. According to the terms of the agreement, Ford and Samuel F. Nixon, owner of the ACADEMY OF MUSIC, would assume the Shubert lease of the AUDITORIUM, pay the \$15,000 yearly rental to the Kernan Co., make repairs to the closed AUDITORIUM, and rent it out. Schanberger disputed the whole arrangement, and declared the lease void. Five years later everybody was on friendly terms, and Schanberger arranged a five-year booking deal with the Shuberts. The AUDITORIUM was to play all of the shows in Baltimore produced by the Shuberts, Al Woods, Elliott, Comstock, and Gest, and Selwyn and Company. The theater remained under the personal direction of Schanberger with Leonard B. McLaughlin as his business manager. During most of the twenties and thirties, the AUDITORIUM presented stock shows with such greats as Marie Dressler, Marjorie Rambeau, Henry Hull, Spencer Tracy, and Paul O'Brien. In 1929, there was a brief attempt to show two-a-day movies with a large orchestra to accompany them, but it was apparently not very successful. By the late thirties, legitimate shows, movies, a political convention or two, and lectures on cooking techniques were not sufficient to keep the AUDITORIUM open. So, in 1939, with a two-week run of "Abie's Irish Rose," it closed. The next year, C. W. Hicks, operator of a small chain of neighborhood theaters, acquired the building. He commissioned local architect E. Bernard Evander (4) to prepare

3. Moving pictures had been shown at the MARYLAND since at least March 1904 when "The Great Train Robbery" and films of the recent Baltimore fire were presented.

4. Mr. Evander was born in Sweden in 1872, and died in Baltimore in March 1975. He studied at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. He designed 7 theaters in addition to the MARYLAND. He was also the architect of the Stanley Theatre, which replaced the Academy, and the new Mayfair marquee on the Auditorium facade.



Photo: Baltimore News American

Above: In this 1917 photo we see the new Auditorium facade and the Academy hosting a Shubert musical comedy.

Below: This 1955 photo reveals the Stanley Theatre, which replaced the Academy, and the new Mayfair marquee on the Auditorium facade.

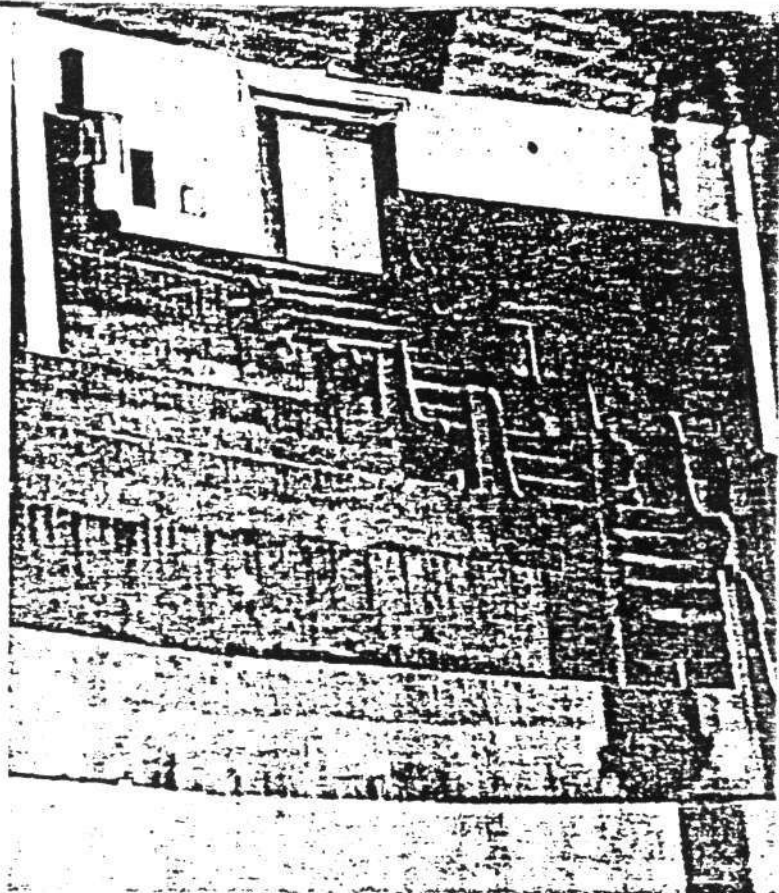
Photo: Robert K. Headley



B-2249

plans for converting the building into a movie house. Credit is due to Evander for the preservation of much of the original building including the front and side walls of the AUDITORIUM. To create a new theater within, the old auditorium was gutted between the dressing rooms and the front entrance and between the first floor and the bottom of the second balcony. A new, false ceiling was installed just below the second balcony and a new proscenium for the screen was built. A new floor was laid and the lobby area was completely remodeled. Incredibly, the original ceiling, projection booth, second balcony, dressing room area, and basement are virtually intact. On the exterior of the theater, the major changes were the addition of a massive triangular marquee and the modernization of the front entrance beneath it.

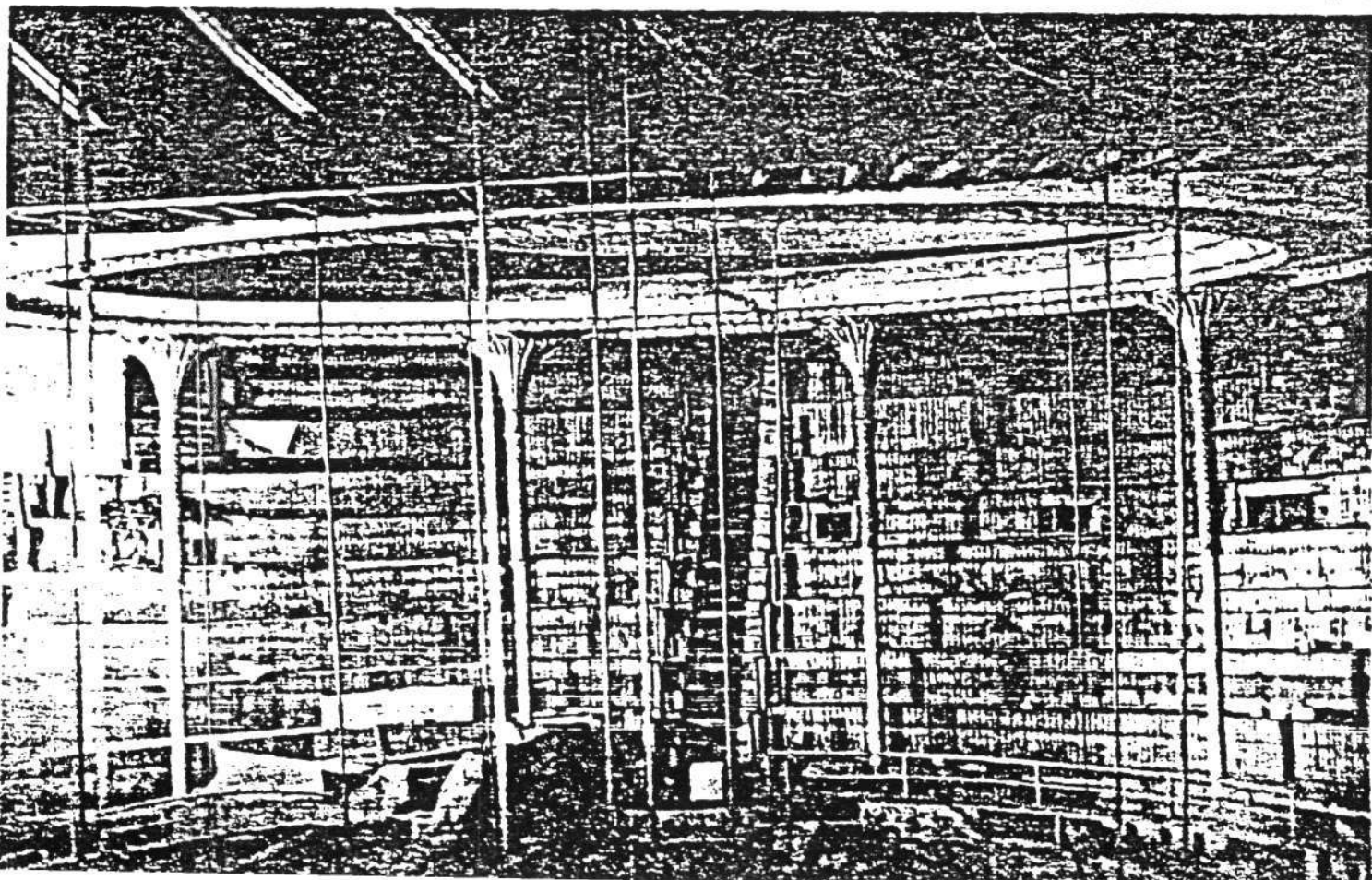
The new movie house, renamed the MAYFAIR, opened on 31 January 1941 with "A Night at Earl Carroll's." At that time, it claimed to be the first theater in the country equipped with facilities to accommodate television and the then-new three dimensional sound. Ultra-violet light, to bring out special effects, was also featured. The MAYFAIR seated about 850 persons, but there was only one really comfortable row in the whole house. Most of the rows were too close together, at least for this writer, but one row—mid-way down on the left—faced an aisle so you could stretch out your legs. The Hicks Circuit operated the MAYFAIR, mainly with Republic pictures, until 1957 when JF Theaters acquired it. By 1960, the MAYFAIR had been equipped with 70mm equipment and the seating had been reduced to 783. It was extensively remodeled in 1963 for the Baltimore premiere of "Lawrence of Arabia" in June of that year. The front of the building as well as the marquee and the lobby were all redone. The inner lobby was paneled with polished walnut. A new curtain of tangerine red was installed, and the auditorium walls were covered with green and blue cloth. New deep red carpeting was laid, and new, glass boxoffices flanked the black tile front. The main entrance was formed of three large, circular doorways framed in gilt metal.



Above: Detail of the second balcony, showing the 1915 projection booth. They apparently had the center aisle closed off to traffic. [Photo, 1975]

Below: The Second Balcony of the Auditorium, viewed from the dressing rooms above the stage in 1975. Now, THAT is what one could call "steep." Note the pillar decorations.

Photo: Robert K. Headley, Jr.



Recently, through the courtesy of THS member Don Gunther, executive director of F Theaters and Mr. R. Crabtree, the assistant manager of the MAYFAIR I, I was able to spend a total of eight hours exploring and photographing the labyrinth remains of the AUDITORIUM. The original right stairway begins past a small door near the manager's office. It ascends three levels past the modern projection booth and mezzanine to the second balcony. There is a feeling of moving back in time the higher one goes until you walk out on to the second balcony and expect to see a Shubert show in full swing. The steeply sloping second balcony is virtually intact since the MAYFAIR's false ceiling is hung just below it. The ceiling of the second balcony is supported by ornamental plaster encased columns and contains a large dome decorated with still bright paintings of muses primping in idyllic settings. The 1915 projection booth, located at the top rear of the second balcony, and also intact, has the portholes almost at floor level. The location of the ports made it necessary to cut a path down through the balcony seating, and undoubtedly made the booth less than satisfactory.

No traces of the proscenium arch could be found, and, after a precarious balancing act across some planks and steel "I" beams, I could see the entire second balcony from atop the dressing rooms. A rickety wooden stairway leads down through three levels of dressing rooms behind the present screen. The chorus dressing room is on the top level, and still contains the make-up tables with wire lightbulb holders above them. The other dressing rooms each contain sinks and other bits of furnishing.

A stairway on the left side of the theater gained by going through the new projection booth goes up to the second balcony and down to the basement. A lobby at the top of the stairway

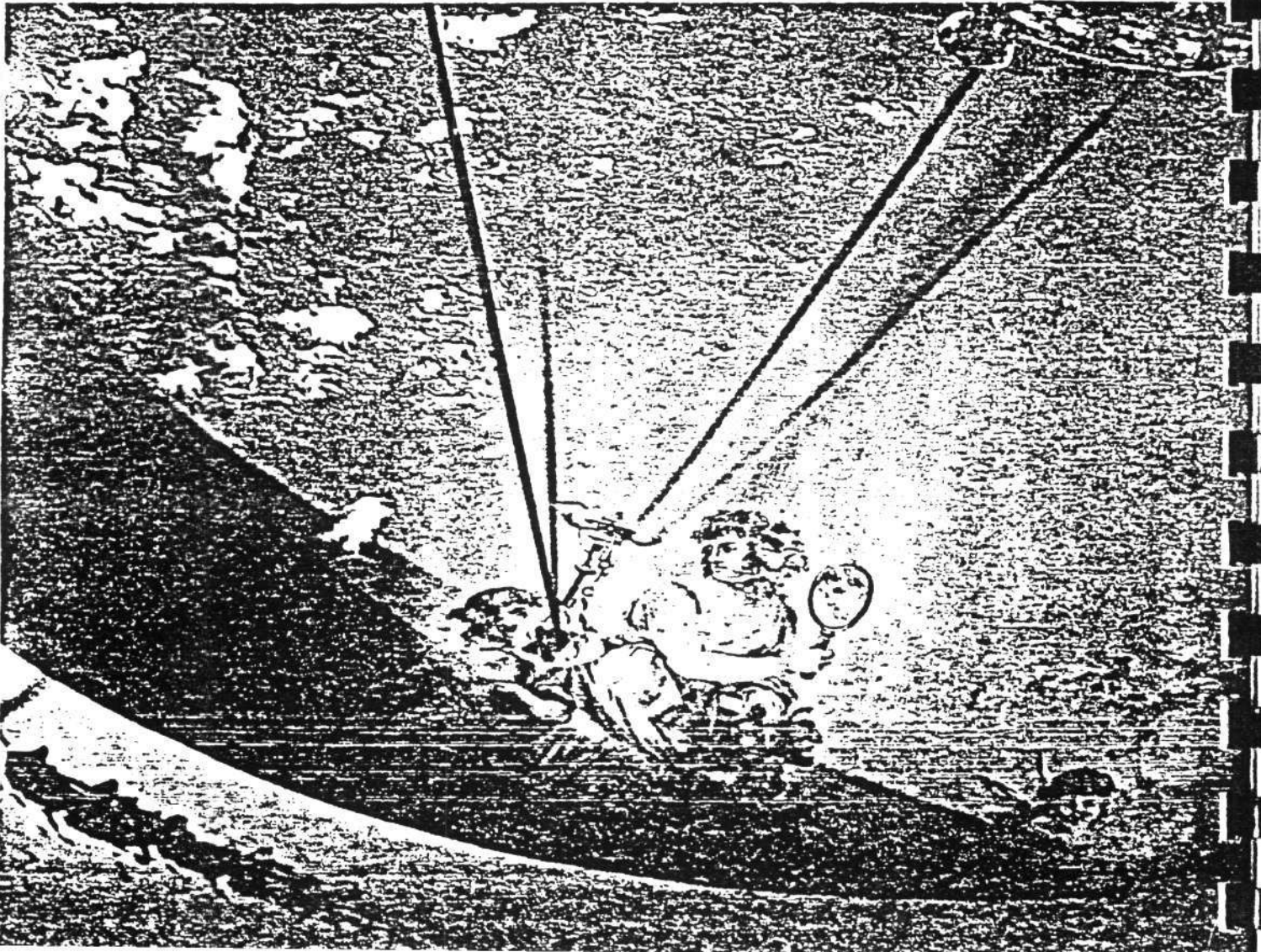
connects the right and left sides. Three stained glass plus many plain glass windows provide light to the lobby. Several small rooms, bathrooms, and what may have been a coat room adjoin this lobby.

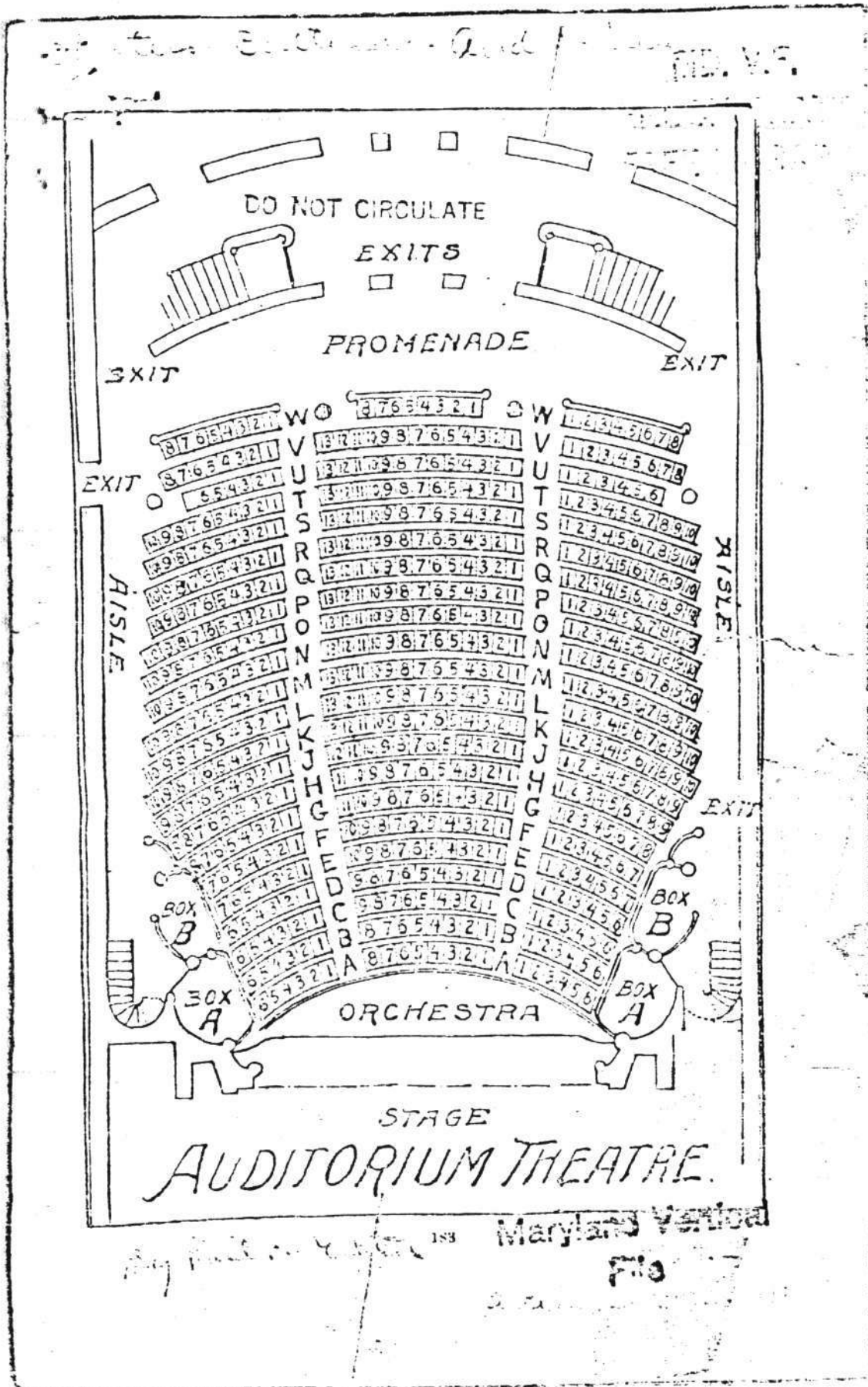
The stairway to the basement leads past a modern ticket booth — now boarded up — through a limestone, arched doorway dating from the 1905 renovation, and down another flight of steps to a long corridor. This corridor runs the entire length of the theater and leads to the Congress Hotel, to the now demolished MARYLAND Theater, to the AUDITORIUM's dressing rooms and machine room, and to the Turkish bath complex beneath the AUDITORIUM. The heart of the Turkish baths was the swimming pool. It is located below the front of the auditorium and measures approximately 20 by 40 feet. Adjacent to the pool are the remains of dressing rooms, showers, steam baths, and exercise or massage rooms. There are even toilet facilities for women. The basement walls are finished in white tile. Marble slabs are spread about lavishly — on the rim of the pool and as table tops.

The myriad of tiny rooms and closets in the AUDITORIUM is a treasure trove of theater history. Behind a wall on the second balcony I found dozens of ancient tickets. In the basement are some of the original doors — huge thick wooden doors with spaces or rectangular glass windows, and a pile of letters, with lightbulb sockets in them, which must have illuminated attractions on the rooftop electric sign.

No doubt there are many other items of theatrical interest hiding in the dark nooks of the MAYFAIR-AUDITORIUM, and hope to spend many more hours discovering the secrets of the theater that time forgot.

Photo: Robert K. Headley, Jr.  
Below: Detail of the dome decoration

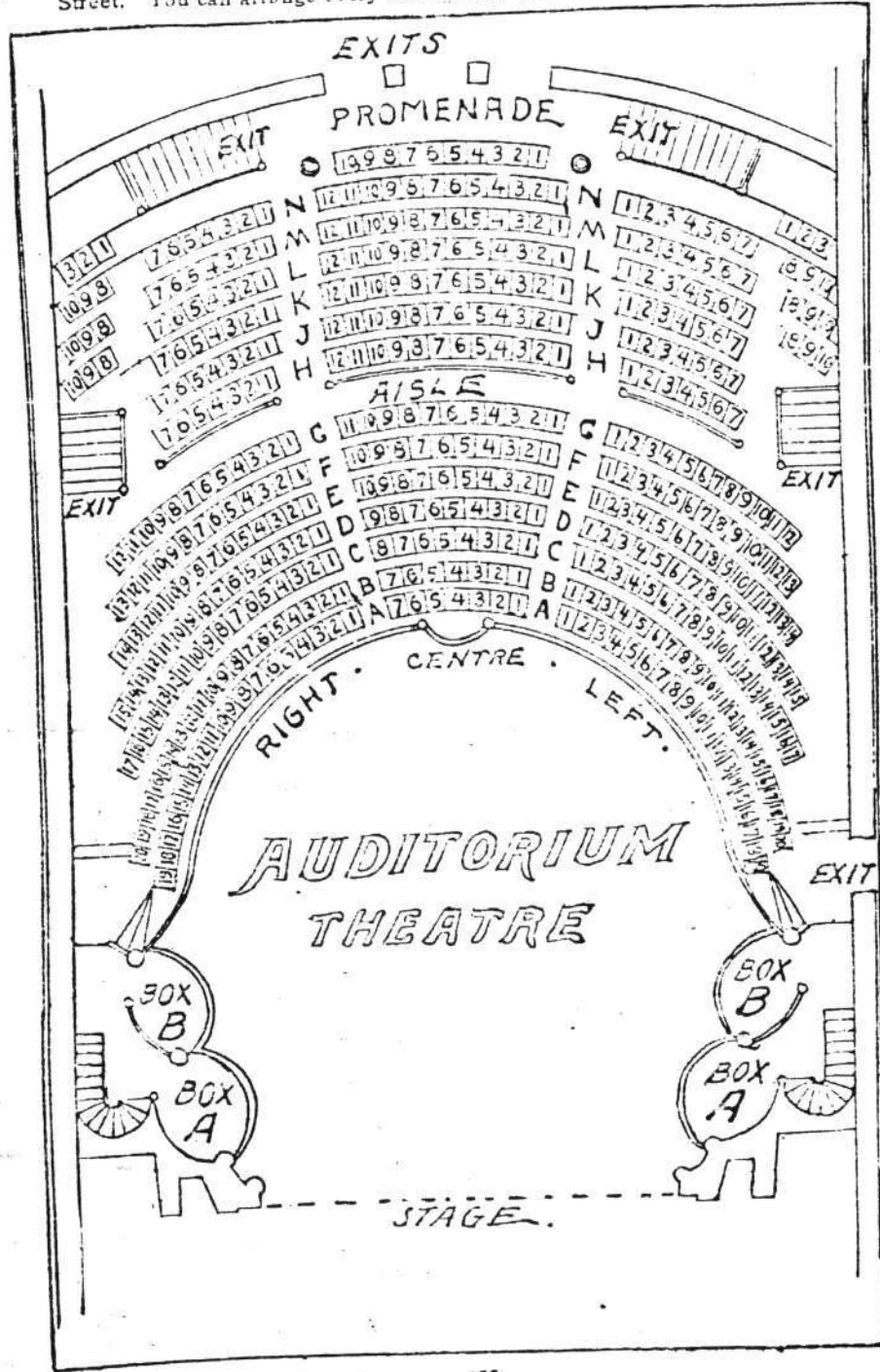


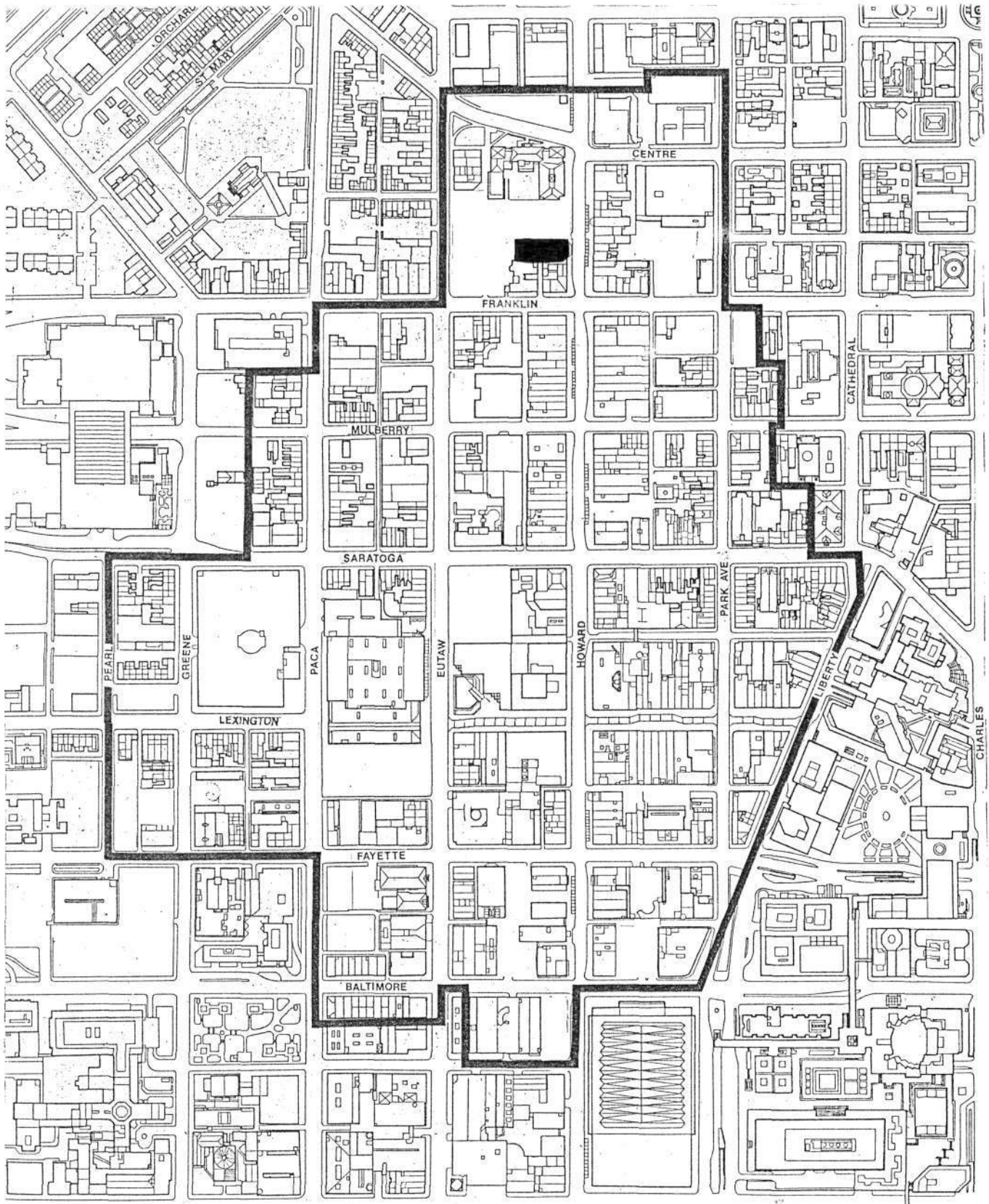


From Maryland Vertical Files, Enoch Pratt Free Library

Seating Plan, Auditorium Theater, c. 1903-1940

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Baltimore Metrocenter Survey  
Market Center  
Mayfair Theatre  
508 North Howard Street  
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Mayfair Theatre B-2249

508 North Howard Street

Market Center - Metrocenter Survey

Baltimore (City), Maryland

Photo: Janet Davis

March 1986

Neg. loc.: Maryland Historical Trust

Northeast corner view

2/3



Mayfair Theatre  
508 North Howard Street  
Market Center - Metrocenter Survey  
Baltimore (City), Maryland

B-2249

Photo: Janet Davis

March 1986

Neg. loc.: Maryland Historical Trust

Detail, main elevation

3/3

B-2249 PW 530

MAG#0422495624

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NOMINATION FORM  
for the  
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COMMON: Mayfair Theater				
AND/OR HISTORIC: Baltimore Natatorium, Howard Auditorium, The Auditorium				
<b>2. LOCATION</b>				
STREET AND NUMBER: 506-14 N. Howard Street				
CITY OR TOWN: Baltimore				
STATE: Maryland			COUNTY:	
<b>3. CLASSIFICATION</b>				
<b>CATEGORY</b> (Check One) <input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object		<b>OWNERSHIP</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both		<b>STATUS</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
<b>ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC</b> Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No				
<b>PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)</b>				
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural	<input type="checkbox"/> Government	<input type="checkbox"/> Park	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/> Comments
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Educational	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Religious		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Scientific		
<b>4. OWNER OF PROPERTY</b>				
OWNER'S NAME:				
STREET AND NUMBER:				
CITY OR TOWN:			STATE:	
<b>5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION</b>				
COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: Records Office Room 601				
STREET AND NUMBER: Baltimore City Courthouse				
CITY OR TOWN: Baltimore			STATE: Maryland	
Title Reference of Current Deed (Book & Pg. #):				
<b>6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS</b>				
TITLE OF SURVEY: City of Baltimore Neighborhood Survey				
DATE OF SURVEY: 1976 <input type="checkbox"/> Federal <input type="checkbox"/> State <input type="checkbox"/> County <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Local				
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: COMMISSION FOR HISTORICAL & ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION				
STREET AND NUMBER: Room 900				
CITY OR TOWN: 26 South Calvert St.			STATE:	
Baltimore, Md. 21202				

## 7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The first floor of this elaborate four story theater has been remodeled. The three pairs of glass and steel entrance doors are enframed by strange curvilinear sidelights and overlights (whose mullions form an "M" over the central pair of doors). Two display cases flank the entrance. On the far left and right are the ticket sellers booths each a  $\frac{1}{2}$  cylinder. Black opaque glass sheaths the walls. The three sided marquee stretches the entire width of the facade and obscures the lower part of the second floor.

Above the marquee, the walls are of horizontally rusticated marble. The top portion of a central round headed arch just visible is flanked by ornamented niches. Each niche is flanked by fluted pilasters and is capped by a shell. A cornice-like band course which stretches across the building over the second floor is emphasized over each niche by a swag, and a rounded split pediment, ornamented with a mask (comedy on the left, tragedy on the right). Two round headed windows are partially visible on both sides of the central composition.

The third and 4th floors are arranged thus; a central portion of 3 bays flanked by two piers which are set between 2 wall sections. The central composition is divided into 3 parts by 2 half columns and 2  $\frac{1}{4}$  columns, 2 stories in height, which are capped by full arches. Each of the three bays on the second floor has a one over one window. The pilasters at this level are pierced by 2 circular windows and the outer bays each by a single one-over-one window. The fourth floor windows between the columns are arranged in 3 piers over a band of guilloche carving. Each pair is capped by a lunette window under the arch. The other 4 windows on this floor are round headed, the ones on the piers set into elaborate pedimented enframements, the outer ones into similar, but flat topped enframements.

The cornice features modillions and a paneled frieze. It forms relief portions where interrupted by the 2 piers, which are crowned by pediments ornamented with scrollwork.

Set back from the cornice is a filed mansard, capped with curbing. Five round headed dormers punctuate this roof.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES  
 COLLEGE PARK, MARYLAND

**B. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                       |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century  | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century |                                       |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input type="checkbox"/> Political           | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric             | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering            | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic                | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry               | <input type="checkbox"/> Science             | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture           | _____                                    |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater             | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> Military               | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation      | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                  |  | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            |   |  | _____                                    |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Originally constructed as the Baltimore Natatorium, this structure was converted in 1890 to its present use as a theater. The interior has since been remodeled numerous times, but the Beaux Arts facade has remained essentially intact above the first floor, one of Baltimore's most ornate.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Blank area for Major Bibliographical References.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	° ' "	° ' "		° ' "	° ' "	
NE	° ' "	° ' "		° ' "	° ' "	
SE	° ' "	° ' "		° ' "	° ' "	
SW	° ' "	° ' "		° ' "	° ' "	

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY:

Acreage Justification:

Blank area for Acreage Justification.

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE: **Planning Assistants**

ORGANIZATION: **COMMISSION FOR HISTORICAL & ARCHITECTURAL PRESERVATION** DATE: **1976**

STREET AND NUMBER: **Room 900**

CITY OR TOWN: **26 South Calvert St. Baltimore, Md. 21202** STATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**12. State Liaison Officer Review: (Office Use Only)**

Significance of this property is:

National  State  Local

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

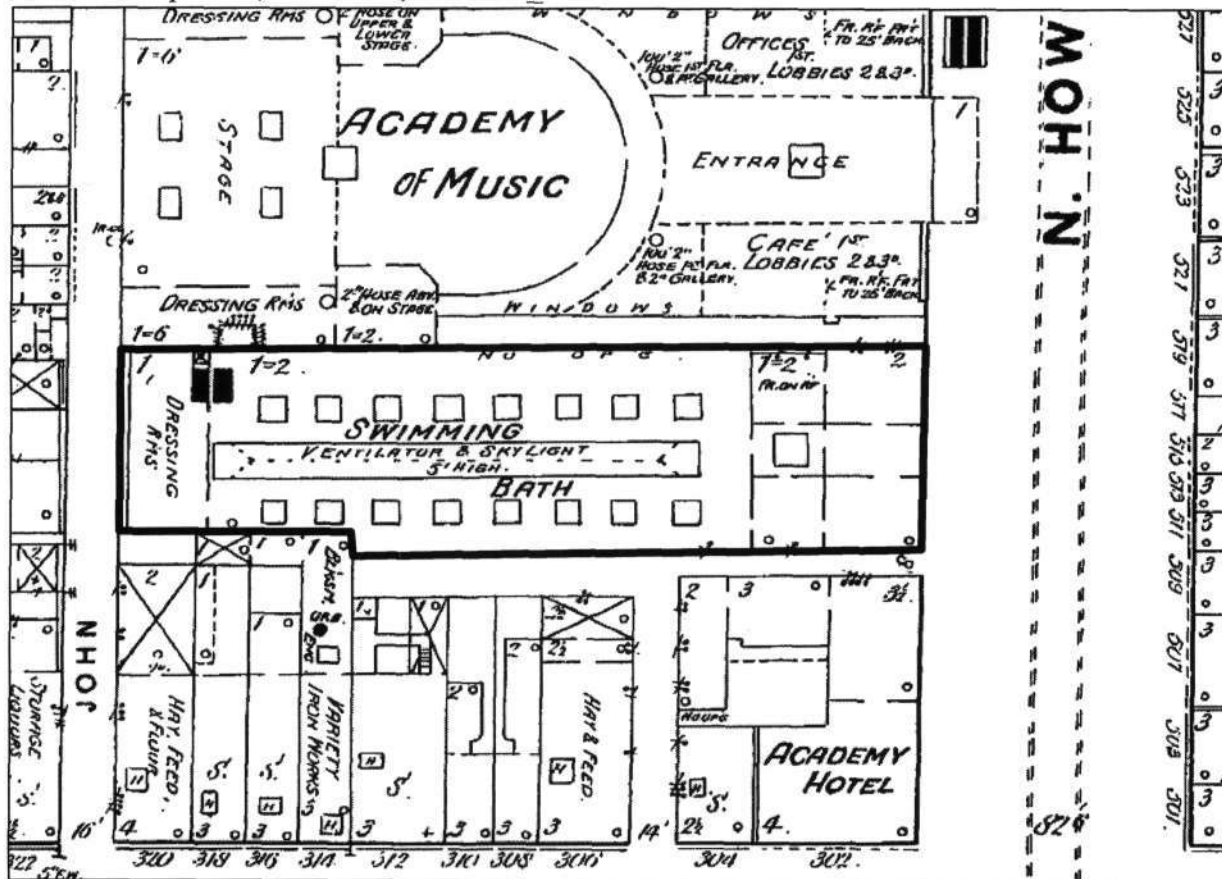
SEE INSTRUCTIONS

B-2249

Mayfair Theater (Howard Auditorium, The Auditorium, Baltimore Natatorium, Polis Auditorium and Turkish Baths)

508 N. Howard Street

Sanborn Map 1890, Volume 2, Sheet 55 a

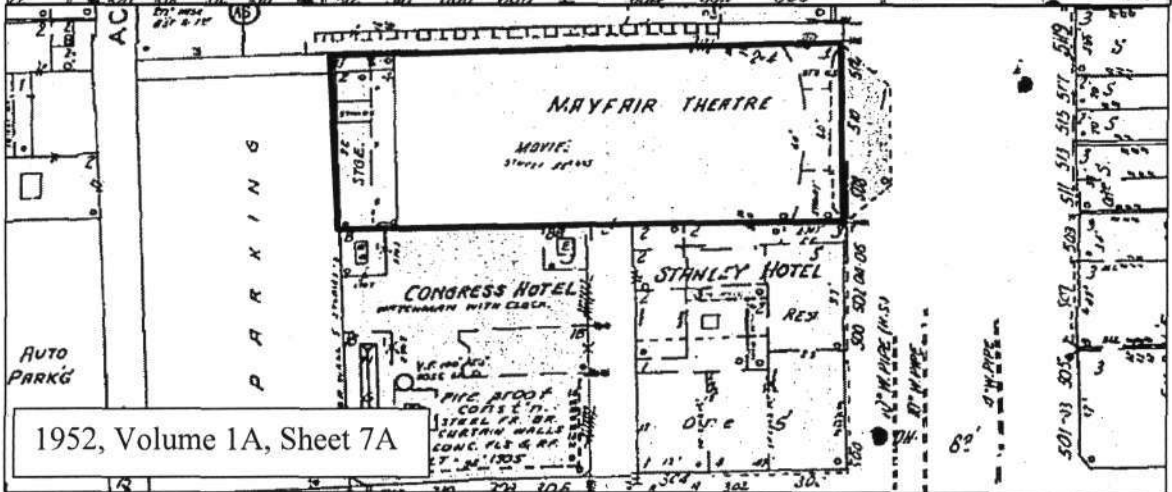
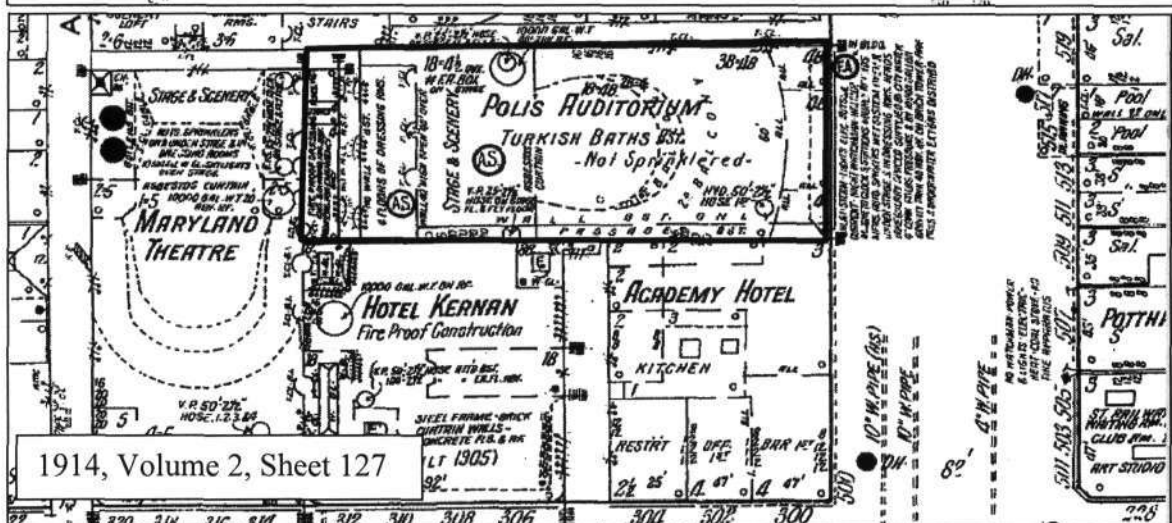
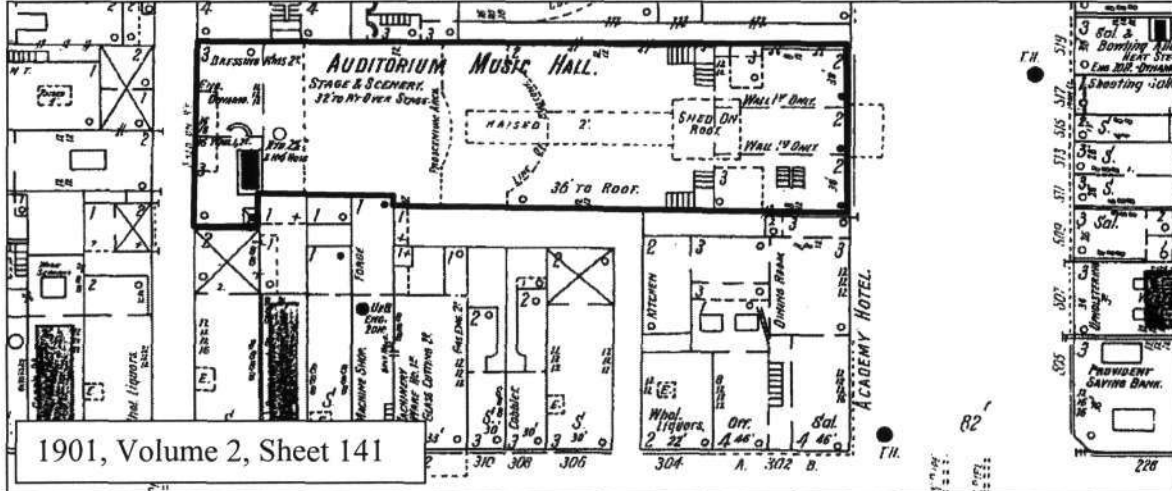


B-2249

Mayfair Theater (Howard Auditorium, The Auditorium, Baltimore Natatorium, Polis Auditorium and Turkish Baths)

508 N. Howard Street

Sanborn Maps





B-2249

Mayfair Theater, ruin (Howard Auditorium, Baltimore Natatorium, Polis Auditorium & Turkish Baths, The Auditorium)

508 N. Howard Street, Baltimore

Late 1880s

Kernan's Howard Street Auditorium at 508 North Howard Street in Baltimore City. Subsequently, it became a movie house, the Mayfair, (circa 1941). It had started out as the Natatorium, a gym with an indoor pool, (circa 1870). James L. Kernan acquired it sometime around 1890 and remodeled it between 1890 and 1903. For almost 40 years, it was known as the Auditorium. This is an excellent front facade view of the Natatorium before 1903.

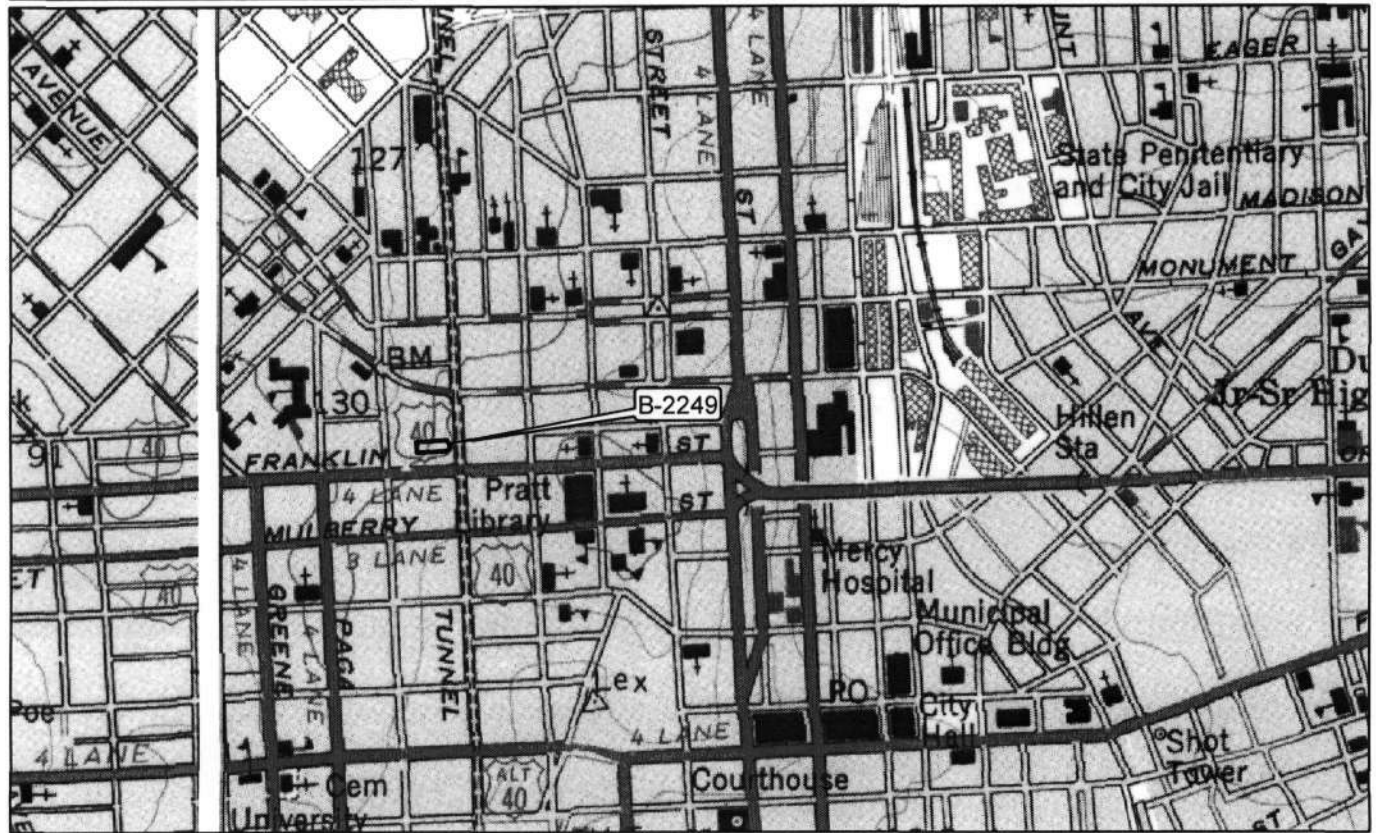
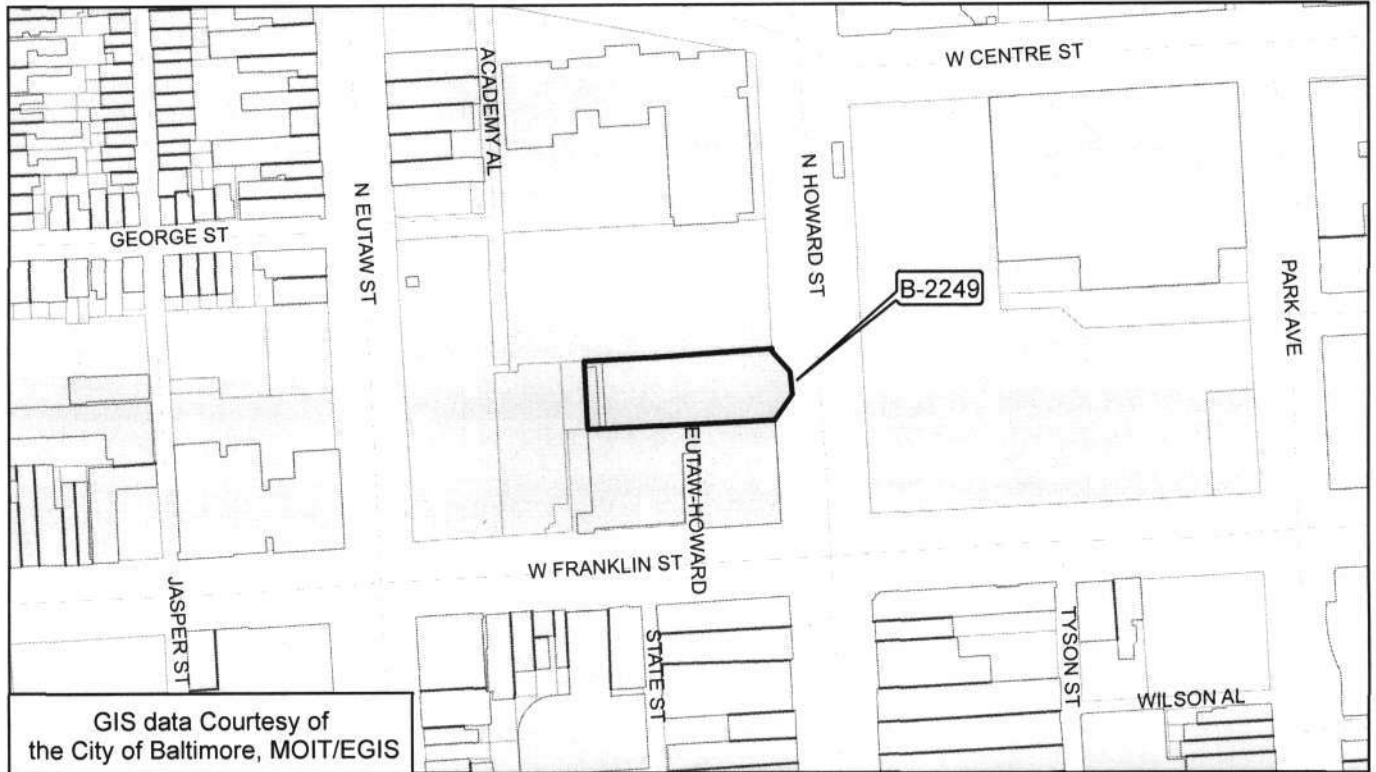
Date: **1898**

Source: **From the Marvin Thomas photo album**



B-2249

Mayfair Theater, ruin (Howard Auditorium, Baltimore Natatorium, Polis Auditorium & Turkish Baths, The Auditorium)  
508 N. Howard Street  
Block 0530, Lot 038  
Baltimore City  
Baltimore East Quad.





**MAYFAIR**

**BIG DOUBLE FEATURE**  
**TRUCK STOP WOMEN**  
**TRUCK TURNER**  
**COMING COOLEY HIGH**

566-14

N. Howard

B-2279

Neg #

2/76

B. Pincok

\$ 602

530